SETTING THE THREE JEWELS:
THE COMPLEX CULTURE OF BUDDHISM AT THE AJAṆṬĀ CAVES

by

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For my parents, David and Bernice Cohen,
whose love, encouragement, and support
have always been without reservation

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This dissertation was born of an epiphany. Walking along a path at Ajaṇṭā, somewhere near Cave 9, I had a realization -- whether in the body or out I do not know -- of how rich the site could be for a scholar of Buddhism. It requires no such epiphany to recognize that one does not become a scholar of Buddhism without the assistance of one's teachers, friends and family.

I am deeply indebted to the members of my committee, whose role in my graduate career commenced long before the dissertation. My most profound debt is to Luis O. Gómez. Driving the chariot of my graduate career, Luis revealed the Dharma of Buddhist studies. But whereas Kṛṣṇa's teachings were broadly universal, his physical form infinite, Luis is best revered for the precision of his insights and the human warmth of his delivery. Walter Spink, my next-door-neighbor at Ajaṇṭā for several months while I was doing research, became my friend as well as teacher. Whether arguing the reasons that a vihāra's wall is askew or dancing to a cassette of eighteenth century waltzes, Walter is the model of a man whose work has redefined an entire field. I am also grateful to Donald Lopez, who taught me Tibetan after a string of inadequate teachers had made me question whether it could ever be taught. More importantly, Don's emphasis on matters theoretical has pushed me to explore avenues of thought that provided an underpinning for the dissertation and will guide my intellectual life for the foreseeable future. Rounding out my committee is Madhav Deshpande, who provides me with an ideal of what a Sanskritist can be.

I also wish to thank the many people who made my year-long research trip to India enjoyable and successful: the many people of USEF/I, beginning with Dr. Amiya Kesavan; the Archaeological Survey of India; Dr. T. V. Pathy in Aurangabad; the people of Fardapur; the chefs of Gopalkrishna Hotel, arguably the best dabha in India; and the crew

at the MTDC Holiday Resort, whose companionship was as welcome as it was inevitable. I returned to America without all the necessary documentation, and thank Leela Wood for her excellent slides and conversation.

Erudition and friendship alone do not a dissertation make. The sources of financial support that enabled the realization of my project include a Fulbright-Hays Dissertation Research Abroad Fellowship to India, a Rackham Predoctoral Fellowship from the University of Michigan, and a Charlotte W. Newcombe Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship for my final year of writing.

An unrepayable debt of gratitude is due my parents, David and Bernice Cohen. They feared I would not return after my first trip to India, but never discouraged me from going; they feared that the path to a degree in Buddhist studies was a long hard road to nowhere, but as long as I kept my eyes on that goal, so did they.

There is a common trope in Buddhist literature, wherein two religious practices are compared, and one is said to not have one hundredth, one thousandth, or even one ten thousandth of the merit of the other. It is in the spirit of this trope that I wish to acknowledge the assistance of Nancy Caciola. Nancy has been my companion, friend, and lover for my entire adult life. And whether it was helping me find the correctly nuanced word, distinguishing "principle" from "principal," or discussing the value of different scholars' takes on ritual, Nancy's contributions to this dissertation have been of singular merit.

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INTRODUCTION

A TRAVELLER'S TALE

The Ajaṇṭā Caves are among India's most frequented tourist destinations. For native visitors the high season runs from the week of Diwali (in November) until late February -- the onset of the cultural, if not climatic, hot-season -- after which the caves are relinquished to those famed mad dogs and Englishmen. Each day during "season," Ajaṇṭā will be visited by several thousand tourists, ranging from Bengali school girls chaperoned on historical tours, to middle-class Bombay families exploring their state, to Gujurati farmers on pilgrimage, these last sometimes unable to afford even the 2¢ admission. Both during season and afterwards, foreign tourists make the excursion to these most extraordinary caves as well: euro-hippie travellers on the Goa-to-Manali drug trail, 5-star jet-setting Germans, Sri Lankan pilgrims, and the ubiquitous shutterbug Japanese.

Wherever these visitors come from and whenever they come, one feature of the Ajaṇṭā experience many share is that a hired guide will lead their tour through the caves. Besides drawing attention to Ajaṇṭā's celebrated masterpieces -- most famous among which are paintings of the "dying princess" and Padmapāṇi's serene smile -- Ajaṇṭā's guides often provide their charges with a first introduction to Buddhist doctrine and history. In Cave 1, tourists learn

about the person of the Buddha. The colossal monolithic Buddha in the cave's shrine has the curious property that, when illuminated from diverse angles, it appears to have subtly distinct facial expressions. Illumined from the right, the edges of the Buddha's mouth curve upwards, from the left, he appears wrathful, and lit frontally from beneath, the Buddha seems to be seated in profound meditative equipoise. Led to Cave Upper 6, tourists learn of the Buddhist Dharma. Several cells inside this cave are fronted by "singing pillars," each of which resonates at a unique frequency when struck by the hand. To recreate the musical devotions this vihāra's residents may have once rendered to the Buddha, guides and visitors alike delight in playing the pillars. Since *Dharma* signifies theory as well as practice, in the interior of Cave 10's cavernous stūpa hall, tourists are told of the ancient split between Hīnayāna (here politely called Theravāda) and Mahāyāna Buddhisms: Hīnayānists worship stūpas, but not images; for the Hīnayānists the Buddha is a super-man, for the Mahāyānists a Supreme God, like Śiva and Viṣṇu. In Cave 16, the subject of the Saṅgha is often introduced. The main image in this vihāra sits upon a throne, with his feet flat on the floor, and incised into his left foot is a fairly large cavity. Tourists are told that this recess was cut by Ajaṇṭā's ancient artisans as a place for the tourists-of-yore to deposit offerings for the Buddhist monks. Thus the guides highlight the saṅgha's social role as a recipient of alms and source of merit . . . a role appropriated today by the tour-guides themselves.

Anyone familiar with the academic literature on Buddhism will recognize that for Ajaṇṭā's tour-guides, scholarship is not central to fulfilling their duties as

religious instructors. They have even been known to fabricate an altogether alternate history for the religion. During the year I lived by the site, I heard one tour-guide inform a bus-load of Italians that, because Buddhism was in decline in the 7th century, Harṣa, King of Kanauj, invited the Chinese pilgrim Hsüan-tsang to India to revivify the religion. According to this guide's tale, Hsüan-tsang's multifaceted programme included the first introduction of female goddesses to the Indian Buddhist pantheon as well as the initiation of the phase of work at Ajaṇṭā responsible for the site's most famous paintings. Although one may be astounded by such blatant disregard for facts, truth, history, and scholarship as we know them to be, the tour guide on the ground understands his job to be to provide a coherently narrative and engaging experience of the caves for the sightseers in his charge. A familiarity with the latest historical theories and the details underlying such theories plays no role when it comes to providing memorable stories for the slide-show back home. Success is measured instead by the guide's ability to use the solid remains surrounding him and his audience to breath life into his story, to make it compelling and memorable.

Ajaṇṭā's caves are a living memorial to Buddhism in India, a matrix from which that ancient religion is excavated at the site daily. However, this work is being undertaken by people for whom discussion of Buddhism is just another way to entertain sightseers. And even if Ajaṇṭā's guides sought to update the Buddhological dimension of their narrations, they would receive little help from the academic community. To date, no concentrated or systematic effort has been made to excavate Ajaṇṭā's Buddhist matrix by those most competent to the task,

scholars of the Buddhist religion. To be sure, the magnificent details of Ajaṇṭā's vihāras, stūpa halls and shrines have attracted the close scrutiny of generations of art-historians. One scholar, Walter Spink, has found such promise in the site that he affirms Ajaṇṭā to be "by all counts, the most minutely, as well as the most totally, analyzable site . . . in the world."[1] Spink makes this claim in regard to the wealth of data for reconstructing a chronology of Ajaṇṭā's motival and architectural developments. Given this site's riches, one wonders whether it also preserves a superabundance of information through which to analyze Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha. But even if Spink's hyperbole cannot be applied to religious evidence at Ajaṇṭā, the work accomplished to date towards recovering Ajaṇṭā's Buddhism would not have exhausted even one of the world's less analyzable sites. If only to supplement the tenuous reportage of commentators at the site a thoroughgoing scholarly treatment of Ajaṇṭā's Buddhism is both desirable and necessary.

A study such as I present, which will read a single archeological site's architecture, paintings, sculptures, and inscriptions as indices of a complex and dynamic local form of Buddhism, has not been attempted by a scholar of Indian Buddhism. Accordingly, because of this project's novelty, beyond being simply an erudite version of a tour guide's narration, it offers an opportunity to review the field's regnant evidential and methodological assumptions. Tour guides are the dilettantes of memory, scholars its virtuosi. In the normative economy of recollection, the scholar sets the terms of the discourse, while the guides are expected

[1] Walter M. Spink. "The Archaeology of Ajaṇṭā," *Ars Orientalis*. 21 (1992): 70.

to disseminate those terms. At Ajaṇṭā, the seeds "Buddha," "Dharma," "Saṅgha," "Mahāyāna" and "Hīnayāna" are daily planted in the fertile meadows of the paying masses' imaginations. But because scholars of Buddhism have largely ignored Ajaṇṭā, one can be certain that the terms and concepts Ajaṇṭā's guides sow did not themselves germinate in analyses of the site's own artifacts. Instead (to extend this metaphor to its end), these categories have been uprooted by scholars from Buddhist literary sources which may have no demonstrable link to Ajaṇṭā, and have been transplanted at the site by local guides regardless of their applicability. This would seem to be a problem. But, the fact is, archaeological artifacts, paintings, architectural programmes, sculptures may not in themselves be materially adequate to the expression of discursive categories of the sort used in a tour-guide's narration. Though a picture is worth a thousand words, no picture can be expected to invent that speech. Might not these guides transplantations be a reasonable response to the often stony silence of Ajaṇṭā's artifacts? In sum, one issue that will run as a thread throughout this study is the methodological tension between 'textual' and 'archaeological' artifacts as adequate and appropriate sources for the reconstruction of local manifestations Buddhist religiosity like that found at Ajaṇṭā.

The complications facing Ajaṇṭā's tour-guides in their capacity as religious instructors are very much like those met by early Europeans who visited the site. As I will discuss below, because the West discovered Ajaṇṭā before it did Buddhism (that is to say, when Buddhism was known-of but little known), the site's first Western visitors had scant basis upon which to make determinations

concerning its icons, chronology, religious or cultural contexts. Instead, heeding Abel Rémusat's advice to the nineteenth-century Orientalist, they "sail[ed] ahead on the ocean of romanticism."[2] Their musings are now treated as quaint relics from a bygone day. In point of fact, one finds that an explosion of understanding followed upon the first dissemination of Buddhist literature in the nineteenth century.

Can one affirm then that categories known solely from textual sources are invaluable, even necessary, for the reconstruction of Ajaṇṭā's Buddhism? Only if, with the same breath, one cautions against a too hasty embrace of such categories. The naive application of concepts and doctrines derived from texts to Ajaṇṭā would make one like Wittgenstein's philosopher, who "always carri[es] a sheet of paper in his pocket on which the names of colors are coordinated with colored patches" so that if asked to fetch a red flower from the meadow he can do so."[3] In this dissertation I intend to pick the flowers first. Checking their colors is but my second order of business. And finally, because the scholar's task ultimately is the normalizing and legitimation of discourses, the color-chart itself might be in for some changes. The tenets, principles, and ideals represented in textual sources may be adjunct to and highly fruitful for the analysis of Ajaṇṭā's archaeological material, but the former cannot not be allowed to determine *a priori* the significance of the latter. Red flowers may well make it in, but the

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[2] Raymond Schwab. *The Oriental Renaissance: Europe's Rediscovery of India and the East, 1680-1880.* Trans. by Gene Patterson-Black and Victor Reinking. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984): 227.

[3] Ludwig Wittgenstein. *The Blue and Brown Books.* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1960): 3-4.

simple fact is, this study of Ajaṇṭā will be a mixed bouquet.

* * *

It is a commonplace in Buddhist commentatorial literature for authors to begin their works with the explanation of their treatises' titles, often indicating how their entire subject matters can be understood through the title. This is a fine tradition, well suited to the form of the modern dissertation as well. *Setting the Three Jewels: The Complex Culture of Buddhism at the Ajaṇṭā Caves*.

Setting: Used metaphorically, this verb draws together the major foci of the title (the Three Jewels, Buddhism, and Ajaṇṭā) in a single image.

Three Jewels: The Three Jewels are the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha, which may be characterized as symbols for Buddhist ideal, belief and practice, and community respectively. This dissertation will treat the act of taking refuge in the Three Jewels as *the* constitutional ritual of Buddhism: a Buddhist is someone who takes refuge in these Jewels. The Three Jewels, true to their metaphor, are gems whose many facets (doctrinal, ideological, institutional, mythical, practical) glint variously in the light of inquiry. Although these Jewels' many faces can never be wholly illumined -- indeed, there would be no magic in a gem evenly illuminated throughout -- all that is Buddhist can finally be reduced to a facet of one of the Three Jewels.

This placement of Buddhism's base-line in the ritual of taking refuge receives wide warrant within the Buddhist tradition. One finds the ritual thus used in one early canonical source like the *Sutta Nipāta*, as well as far more recently, in the apologist Walpola Rāhula's *What the Buddha Taught*. Somewhere

in the middle, the 13th century Tibetan hierarch Sa skya paṇḍita's *Inspirational Letters* provide this idea's clearest statement: "One does not enter the ranks of Buddhists until one has gone for refuge."[4]

Indeed, one can find in Buddhist literature hints suggesting that one cannot approach any of the individual Jewels unless one accepts all three. How might one approach the Buddha? One answer is found in the tale of the taming of the nāga king Apalāla, told in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*, a crucial text for Ajaṇṭā.[5] Very briefly indeed, this nāga attacks the Buddha, the Buddha counter-attacks, conquers Apalāla, and gives him to understand that he is destined for hell if he does not repent his ways. Apalāla, taking the hint, asks the Buddha what to do. The Buddha responds: "You must, in my presence, take refuge in the Three Jewels."[6] How to approach the Dharma? To cite Sa skya paṇḍita again: "The [act of] going for refuge is the foundation of the Dharma."[7] Finally, if we extend the Saṅgha beyond its restricted meaning of only the members of the Buddhist monastic community, to include all who take specifically Buddhist vows of re-straint, we find a confirmation of this principle in Vasubandhu's stipulation that the taking of refuge must precede acceptance of Buddhist moral regulations:

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[4] *thog mar skyabs 'gro ma byas na, sangs rgyas pa'i khongs su mi chud.* Sa skya paṇḍita. *Sulekha of Sakya Paṇḍita (skyes-bu-dam-pa-rnams-spriṅ-wahi-yi-ge-bzhugs-so).* Ed. by Madan Mohan Singh. (Patna: Bihar Research Society, 1971): 49.

[5] See Jean Przyluski ("Le Nord-Ouest de l'Inde dans le Vinaya des Mūla-sarvāstivādin et les Textes Apparentés," *Journal Asiatique.* série XI, 4 [1914]: 510-512) for a translation from the Chinese. John Strong (*The Legend and Cult of Upagupta: Sanskrit Buddhism in North India and Southeast Asia.* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992]: 26-28) has an interesting discussion of this popular tale, and his end-notes provide references for locating its many textual redactions and artistic illustrations.

[6] Przyluski. "Le Nord-Ouest de l'Inde," 512.

[7] *chos kyi gzhi skyabs 'gro yin.* Sa skya paṇḍita. *Sulekha,* 49.

"the [act of] going for refuge is the threshold for the undertaking of all vows of restraint."[8]

Complex: This is an adjective, qualifying 'Culture.' Culture is complex because cultural meaning transcends the limits that any culture will place upon what it considers meaningful.

Culture: For the purposes of this dissertation, I am treating culture as the shared symbolic values that connect a random population into a society. The complex culture referred to in this dissertation's title is a culture in which the symbols that order and give meaning to social interaction cannot be treated as thoroughly or absolutely transparent either to a cultural insider or an outsider such as myself. Accordingly, the phrase 'Complex Culture' was added to this title for two reasons. First, these words indicate that my primary interest lies in the social dimensions of Ajaṇṭā's religious expressions, and second they signal the tentative and incomplete nature of this study, as of any study that addresses social phenomena.

Buddhism: As indicated above, within this dissertation Buddhism is to be understood as that which may be encompassed through the multi-valent symbols of the Three Jewels. These Jewels provide a reliable basis for working out what is and is not "Buddhist" at Ajaṇṭā, and simultaneously offer an ideal structure through which to explore and discuss the evidence found there.

Ajaṇṭā: I will treat this topic at greater length in the next chapter. For now

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[8] *śaraṇagamanāni sarvasaṃvarasamādeṣu dvārabhṛtāni.* Vasubandhu. *Abhidharmakośa and Bhāṣya of Ācārya Vasubandhu with Sphūṭārthā Commentary of Ācārya Yaśomitra.* Ed. by Dwarika Das Shastri. (Varanasi: Bauddha Bharati, 1987): 630.

suffice it to say that the Ajaṇṭā Caves are a set of 36 monastic residences, worship halls, and shrinelets hewn out of a sheer mountain scarp on a bend of the Waghora River in Western India, approximately 220 miles north-east by east from Bombay. Work at the site occured in two phases, the first of which ranged from approximately 100 B.C.E. to 100 C.E. According to the prevailing theory, the second phase covered the period between 462 and 480 C.E. My study will focus upon this second period exclusively. As I have already indicated, this site is unique in India for its wealth of archeological data touching on Buddhism, which includes evidence in the form of epigraphs, architectural programs, paintings, and sculptures.

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In the course of introducing this dissertation, I have touched upon two themes. First, although the Ajaṇṭā caves preserve a rich and well-preserved lode of evidence for reconstructing Indian Buddhism, this source has not been mined; second, a site like Ajaṇṭā is valuable because it provides scholars of Buddhism an opportunity to set textual sources side by side with archaeological for producing a fuller picture of Buddhism as a living local religion. In order to address both issues the dissertation is divided into two principal parts. The first division, entitled "Prolegomena to the Study of Ajaṇṭā's Buddhism," treats matters that must be addressed before I can begin the study of Ajaṇṭā's Buddhism proper. There are two prolegomena. Religion being preeminently a cultural and social phenomenon, one must explore matters religious within their historical contexts; this is the focus of the first chapter where I take the chronological

investigations of art historian Walter Spink as a *point d'appui* from which to reconstruct the historical events affecting Ajaṇṭā's patrons and their project. Moreover, if one would study Buddhism at Ajaṇṭā, the evidence must itself be delimited: what are the available sources and how can we use them? The dissertation's second chapter, therefore, explores the nature of archaeological and textual sources, and the type of information each may be expected to provide for the historian of Ajaṇṭā's Buddhism. Additionally, in this second chapter I select and elaborate a 'canon' of literary texts apropos to the reconstruction of Ajaṇṭā's Buddhism.

A sage has cautioned me that one must expect a work of this sort to be like slicing through the Gordian Knot: some problems are solved only by leaving many more loose ends. These sage words can assuredly apply to this dissertation's second half, wherein I attempt to elaborate the significance of the multivalent symbols of Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha at Ajaṇṭā. Because this is a preliminary study, each chapter in this division attempts to illuminate its Jewel in a clear white light, without being overly subtle. "Saṅgha: Ajaṇṭā's Community and its Patrons" focusses upon two interrelated issues: who belonged to Ajaṇṭā's community, both lay and monastic, and how did these individuals come together as a community of patrons and recipients. In the course of this chapter we will find that a significant proportion of Ajaṇṭā's donors identify themselves by an epithet that may be interpreted as suggesting they were themselves blood members of □ākyamuni Buddha's own family. The chapter entitled, "Dharma: The Theory and Practice of Buddhism at Ajaṇṭā," explores the ideological

ramifications of this epithet, whereby I seek to recover the self-understanding of Ajaṇṭā's community as Buddhists. Finally, the third chapter of this division, "Buddha: Ajaṇṭā's Ideal Savior," investigates at the relationship between the members of Ajaṇṭā's community and the Buddha himself. Taking its start from two incidents in the Buddha's life that are narrated in Ajaṇṭā's paintings, I examine what it means for the Buddha to have created, maintained, and purified a community of devotees through the performance of miraculous acts, and how those acts continued to hold meaning for a community founded one millennium after the Buddha's decease.

PART I:

PROLEGOMENA TO

THE STUDY OF AJAṆṬĀ'S BUDDHISM

CHAPTER I

ON THE HISTORY OF A PLACE, AUSPICIOUS AND DELIGHTFUL

Ajaṇṭā, An Introduction

Before Ajaṇṭā's tour-guides begin their tales of history and art, the caves themselves present an eloquent tableau. This dissertation will attempt to set the Ajaṇṭā caves within historical and religious contexts, but the first, most prominent, and obvious truth about Ajaṇṭā, a peculiarity that impresses present visitors as much as it must have those of days gone bye, is the caves' physical setting. I begin this introduction to the site, accordingly, with James Burgess' report of the visual impact Ajaṇṭā will have made upon visitors of all times:

> The Ajaṇṭā caves are situated in the Indyādri or Ajaṇṭā range of hills, which supports the north side of the table-land of the Dekhan, and forms the great watershed of the feeders of the Godāvari and of the Tāpī. From the northern face of the hills the streams run into the Arabian Sea, but from the plateau to the south they flow to the Bay of Bengal. Among these hills, 220 miles north-east by east from Bombay, is the small town of Ajaṇṭā . . . . The caves lie about four miles WNW of this, but to reach them the traveller must descend the ghāṭ to Fardāpur, about four miles to the NNW . . . .
>
> About three and a half miles south-west from Fardāpur is the ravine of Lenāpur -- so named from the caves.[1] The road leading to them from Fardāpur, at best only a bridle path, lies at first in a southerly direction, but . . . we turn more to the south-west, up the ravine, gradually narrowing as we follow the follow the windings of [a] river, which we cross twice. The scenery now becomes more wooded, more lonely, and more savagely grand; and as we next descend into the bed of the stream, we see to the right a wall of almost perpendicular rock, about 250 feet high, sweeping round to the left in a curve of more than half a circle, into the hollow of which a wooded promontory -- surmounted by a coronet of rock -- juts out from the opposite side of the stream. The caves are thus excavated in the

[1] *Leṇā* is Marathi for man-made, carved caves like those found at Ajaṇṭā; natural caves are known as *guhā*.

> loft wall of the outer bend or concave scarp of the *cul de sac* thus formed. Above them the glen terminates abruptly in a waterfall of seven leaps, known as the *sāt kund*, the lower of which may be 70 to 100 feet in height, and the others 100 feet or more . . . .
>
> The caves extend about a third of a mile from east to west round the concave wall of amygdaloid trap that hems in the stream on its north or left side. They vary in elevation from about 35 to 110 feet above the bend of the torrent. . . . The series consists of twenty-nine in all, namely, five Caityas or temples and twenty-four Vihāras or monastery caves; and for purposes of reference . . . they are generally distinguished by the numbers attached to them by Mr. Fergusson, beginning at the eastern end of the series, or that furthest down the stream . . . .
>
> The Ajaṇṭā Caves must have been executed at a time when the religion enjoyed the highest patronage, and from their architectural style and the subjects of sculpture, we are led to assign some of them at least to an early age,--possibly one or two centuries before Christ, while none of them can date later than the seventh, and possibly not after the fifth or sixth century of the Christian era.[2]

Such are the Ajaṇṭā Caves (Fig. 1). Burgess' prose presents Ajaṇṭā with an air of awe and mystery, both of which stay with one even after living among the caves for many months. But, whereas the awe is an emotional reaction to the site's grandeur, the mystery can be viewed as a function of our many uncertainties regarding Ajaṇṭā's creation and history. Even the number of caves is not fully known. In 1874 James Burgess counted twenty-nine caves at the site. Presently one can reckon as many as thirty-six independent foundations, including monastic residences, stūpa halls suitable for communal worship, and independent shrinelets that receive little attention from tourists and almost none from scholars. The most recent discovery was of Cave 15a in the late 1950s, which was uncovered during an earthquake. Still more caves may lie under mounds of earth that fell in rock-slides centuries past.

Beyond uncertainties in the number of caves excavated at Ajaṇṭā, the dating of the site is still not settled. Burgess's description of Ajaṇṭā's geographical context hints at a certain chronological scheme for the caves' arrangement. But he did not formally analyze the site chronologically until the 1880 publication of *The Cave Temples of India*, co-

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[2] James Burgess. "The Ajaṇṭā Caves," *Indian Antiquary.* 3 (1874): 269-270, 273.

authored with James Fergusson. In this later work, Ajaṇṭā is said to have been excavated in two phases, periodized through appeal to Buddhist terminology as “Hīnayāna” and “Mahāyāna” respectively. The recent work of Walter Spink has recast both the terms and the dates of Ajaṇṭā’s chronology. According to Spink, the so-called Hīnayāna phase spanned the first century B.C.E. to the first C.E. The second period, which he calls the “Vākāṭaka,” after the dynasty ruling the area at the time, was approximately 462-480 C.E. In Spink’s reckoning nothing was added to the site in the interval between these two terms of activity (he does not deny the possibility that the caves were inhabited or used), and the termination of the Vākāṭaka phase of activity is virtually coterminous with the full abandonment of the site by patrons, artisans, and monks alike.[3] Thus all artifacts not deriving from Ajaṇṭā’s “Hīnayāna” phase are linked by Spink to the 18 year span of Vākāṭaka patronage. Those caves belonging to the earlier set are five in number: 9, 10, 12, 13, and 15a; the later excavations number thirty-one in total: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, lower 6, upper 6, 7, 8, 9a, 10a, 11, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 23a, 24, 25, 26, 26 lower right, 26 lower left, 27, 28, 29, and the Ghaṭotkaca caves, which were donated by the same figure responsible for Ajaṇṭā’s Cave 16. Additionally during the later period, renovations, such as new plastering and painting, were carried out upon the early caves.

My study of Ajaṇṭā will focus upon the artifacts from this second period of work. This dissertation takes as a fundamental presupposition that between the approximate

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[3] Some evidence of post-Vākāṭaka activity at Ajaṇṭā does exist, although none of it is Buddhist in nature. This evidence includes graffiti in Caves 17 (app. A, Nos. 80, 81, 82), 20 (app. A, No. 85), 26 (app. A, No. 97) and Ghaṭotkaca Cave (app. A, No. 99), all of which may be dated paleographically to the late 6th through 8th centuries. We also have the testimony of Hsüan-tsang (*Si-Yu Ki: Buddhist Records of the Western World, translated from the Chinese of Hiuen Tsiang (A.D. 629)*. Trans. by Samuel Beal. [Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1981]: vol. 2, 257-259; Thomas Watters. *On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India (A.D. 629-645)*. [Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1973]: vol. 2, 239-41), whose knowledge of Ajaṇṭā is dated by Vincent Smith to 641-2 C.E. (Watters. *On Yuan Chwang's Travels,* vol. 2, 336). While we cannot be sure whether this Chinese pilgrim visited Ajaṇṭā personally, his familiarity with the site combined with his silence regarding any Buddhist community thereat harmonizes with the epigraphic evidence: Ajaṇṭā was known and visited in these latter centuries but was not a continuous monastic habitation.

years 462 and 480 C.E. Ajaṇṭā was occupied, supported, and excavated by a single community; a second presupposition is that the architecture, paintings, sculptures, epigraphs &c. of this single archeological site are representative of a complex and vibrant form of Buddhism characteristic of that local community. When I write “Ajaṇṭā” or “the site” or “the caves” I will generally mean those artifacts created during the time of Vākāṭaka activity unless I stipulate otherwise or unless it is clear that the site as a whole is indicated.

To further clarify my terms: “local community” here means a community of interest. It does not necessarily imply that all members of Ajaṇṭā’s community lived at or near the site, or even that all ever personally visited it. My conception of this community is modeled on Brain Stock’s idea of a ‘Textual Community,’ which for him involves “an individual, who, having mastered [a written text], then utilized it for reforming a group’s thought and action.”[4] With the historical data at our disposal, there is little scope for considering Ajaṇṭā’s community as centered around a single charismatic individual. Instead, I hypothesize that the text around which Ajaṇṭā’s community formed was not written, but the site itself: Ajaṇṭā’s community includes those people whose thoughts and actions were re-formed vis-à-vis the Three Jewels through their participation at the site. This community broadly included monks and nuns, courtiers and royal advisors, artisans, and coolies, and patrons, running the gamut from simple monks, to travelling merchants, to local dignitaries, to a high minister of the King and the King himself.

To conclude this introductory section: I entitled my dissertation’s first division using an unfortunately pedantic term from Greek, because “prolegomena” are those subjects that must necessarily be treated before one can investigate one’s principle area of interest. For the study of Ajaṇṭā’s Buddhism, prolegomena include the questions of who was responsible for Ajaṇṭā? when did they create the site? under what circumstances? what

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[4] Brian Stock. *The Implications of Literacy.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983): 90.

was it they created? Based upon Spink's work, I have claimed that a community lived at and/or participated in the creation of Ajaṇṭā between the years of 460 and 480 C.E., and that this community was responsible for an identifiable set of artifacts. But both assertions are in need of substantiation. The present chapter will treat the first of these prolegomena: the political and historical context within which the Vākāṭaka period Ajaṇṭā caves were created; the next chapter will address the questions of sources and methodology. However, as a preface to these linked but separate studies -- the historical positioning of Ajaṇṭā, the methodological, and the evidential -- it will be valuable to first review prior scholarship concerning the site, to situate the present dissertation within a tradition of Ajaṇṭā studies.

A Review of the Scholarship

A significant bibliography of works on the Ajaṇṭā caves has accumulated since their "discovery" in 1819 by a company of officers from the Madras Army. According to local legend, these soldiers interrupted a Northbound trek through the Ajaṇṭā ghāṭ in order to hunt tigers. A local boy tendered his services to these strange men and led them to a tiger's lair, now known as Cave 10. Whatever the truth of this story, a definite *terminus ad quem* for the caves's modern history can be set at 28 April 1819, the date on which John Smith of the 28th Cavalry scratched his name over a Buddha painted on a pillar in Cave 10.[5] Since that fateful day John Smith began writing on Ajaṇṭā, the bulk of literature has focused largely upon descriptions of the site's paintings, sculpture, and architecture,[6] identifications

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[5] Cf. app. A, No. 62.

[6] General works on this topic include: James Bird. *Historical Researches on the Origin and Principle of the Bauddha and Jaina Religions.* (Bombay: American Mission Press, 1847); James Burgess. *Notes on the Bauddha Rock-Temples of Ajanta, their Paintings and Sculptures, and on the Paintings of the Bagh Caves, Modern Bauddha Mythology, &c.* (Bombay: Government Central Press, 1879); James Fergusson and James Burgess. *The Cave Temples of India.* (Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint, 1969); Mukul Chandra Dey. *My Pilgrimages to Ajanta & Bagh.* (New York: George H. Dorna

of its narrative and iconographic scenes,[7] and the setting of a chronology for the caves' excavation.[8] In conjunction with this scrutiny of the caves' art-historical testimony, two additional bodies of work have collected, one to provide reproductions of Ajaṇṭā's masterpieces for public consumption[9] and a second that revolves around editions and

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Company, 1925); Ghulam Yazdani. *Ajanta. The Colour and Monochrome Reproductions of the Ajanta Frescoes Based on Photography.* (London: Oxford University Press, 1930-55); Stella Kramrisch. *Exploring India's Sacred Art: Selected Writings of Stella Kramrisch.* Ed. by Barbara Stoler Miller. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983): 273-307; Madhukar Keshav Dhavalikar. *Ajanta: A Cultural Study.* (Poona: University of Poona, 1974); Debala Mitra. *Ajanta.* (New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1980).

[7] See, for instance: L. A. Waddell. "The Buddhist Pictorial Wheel of Life," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal.* 61 (1892): 133-35; S. F. Oldenberg. "Notes on Buddhist Art Identifications of the Jataka-sculptures," *Journal of the American Oriental Society.* 18 (1897): 183-201; Heinrich Lüders. "Ārya Śūra's *Jātakamālā* and the Frescoes of Ajaṇṭā," *Indian Antiquary.* 32 (1903): 326-28; Alfred Charles Foucher. "Lettre d'Ajaṇṭā," *Journal Asiatique.* 17 (1921): 201-45; Marcelle Lalou. "Trois Récits du Dulva reconnus dans les peintures d'Ajaṇṭā," *Journal Asiatique.* 207 (1925): 333-37; Yazdani. *Ajanta;* Dieter Schlingloff. *Studies in the Ajanta Paintings: Identifications and Interpretations.* (Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1988).

[8] Chronological highlights include: Fergusson and Burgess. *The Cave Temples of India*; Wayne Edison Begley. *The Chronology of Mahāyāna Buddhist Architecture and Painting at Ajaṇṭā.* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1966); Philippe Stern. *Les Colonnes indiennes d'Ajanta et d'Ellora: évolution et répercussions (styles gupta et post-Gupta).* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1972); Shiela L. Weiner. *Ajaṇṭā: Its Place in Buddhist Art.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977); Karl Khandalavala. "The History and Dating of the Mahayana Caves of Ajanta," *Pathik.* 2.1 (1990): 18-21; Walter M. Spink. *Ajanta to Ellora.* (Ann Arbor: Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, The University of Michigan, 1967); Walter M. Spink. "Ajaṇṭā's Chronology: The Problem of Cave Eleven," *Ars Orientalis.* 7 (1968): 155-168; Walter M. Spink. "Ajaṇṭā's Chronology: The Crucial Cave," *Ars Orientalis.* 10 (1975): 143-169, plates 1-16; Walter M. Spink. "Ajaṇṭā's Chronology: Politics and Patronage." In *Kalādarśana.* Ed by Joanna G. Williams. (New Delhi: Oxford and IBH Publishing in collaboration with the American Institute of Indian Studies, 1981): 109-126; Walter M. Spink. "Ajaṇṭā's Chronology: Cave 7's Twice Born Buddha." In *Studies in Buddhist Art of South Asia.* Ed. by A. K. Narain. (New Delhi: Kanak Publications, 1985); Walter M. Spink. "Ajanta's Chronology: Solstitial Evidence," *Ars Orientalis.* 15 (1985): 97-119; Walter M. Spink. "Ajaṇṭā's Paintings: A Checklist for their Dating." In *Dimensions of Indian Art: Pupul Jayakar Seventy.* Ed. by Lokesh Candra and Jyotindra Jain (Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan, 1986); Walter M. Spink. "Ajaṇṭā in a Historical and Political Context," *Pathik.* 2.1 (1990): 5-17; Walter M. Spink. "The Archaeology of Ajaṇṭā," *Ars Orientalis.* 21 (1992): 67-94; Walter M. Spink. "Reply to K. Khandalavala, A. Jamkhedkar, B. Deshpande," *Pathik.* 3.4 (1992): 16-25; Walter M. Spink. "A Scholar's Guide to the Ajaṇṭā Caves," typescript.

[9] John Griffiths. *The Paintings in the Buddhist Cave-Temples of Ajanta, Khandesh, India.* (London, 1896-97); Christiana Jane Powell Lady Herringham. *Ajanta Frescos, Being Reproductions in Colour and Monochrome of Frescoes in Some of the Caves at Ajanta, after Copies Taken in the Years 1909-11.* (Oxford, 1915); Yazdani. *Ajanta*; Madanjeet Singh. *Ajanta: Ajanta Painting of the Sacred and the Secular.* (New York: Macmillan, 1965); Amalananda Ghosh. *Ajanta Murals: An Album of Eighty-five Reproductions in Colour.* (New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1967); Osamu Takata. *Ajanta.* (Tokyo: Heibonsha Ltd, 1971).

translations of Ajaṇṭā's numerous inscriptions.[10]

The lack of a significant bibliography concerning Ajaṇṭā's religion does not mean that these caves' importance for recovering ancient Indian Buddhism has gone unnoticed. James Burgess observed, "When we can read the history of Buddhism, as it is to be found in its immense literature, we cannot doubt but these pictures will throw much light upon it and by-gone times."[11] Indeed, the first published notice of the caves -- William Erskine's report read to the Bombay Literary Society on July 31, 1821 -- was attentive to their religious milieu. Entitled "Observations on the Remains of the Bouddhists in India,"[12] Erskine's report was one of the first systematic attempts to set criteria for distinguishing Buddhist, Jain, and Brāhmaṇical archaeological remains. Nevertheless, several of Erskine's own observations, and much of the earliest stratum of literature on Ajaṇṭā, clearly demonstrate that before the caves could realize the promise Burgess saw therein, at least

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[10] James Prinsep. "Facsimiles of Various Ancient Inscriptions," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*. 5 (1836): 348-9, 556-561, plate ix, #4, plate xxviii, #9, #10, #11; Bird. *Historical Researches*; Bhau Daji. "Ajunta Inscriptions," *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*. 7 (1863): 53-74; Burgess. *Notes on the Bauddha Rock-Temples;* James Burgess and Pandit Bhagwanlal Indraji. *Inscriptions from the Cave Temples of Western India with Descriptive Notes, &c.* (Delhi: Indian India, 1976); James Burgess *Report on the Buddhist Cave Temples and their Inscriptions*. (Varanasi: Bharatiya Publishing House, 1975); John Allen. "A Note on the Inscriptions of Cave II," Appendix to G. Yazdani. *Ajanta*. vol. 2. (London: Oxford University Press, 1933); N. P. Chakravarti. "A Note on the Painted Inscriptions in Caves VI-XVII," Appendix to G. Yazdani. *Ajanta*. vol. 3. (London: Oxford University Press, 1946); N. P. Chakravarti & B. Ch. Chhabra. "Notes on the Painted and Incised Inscriptions of Caves XX-XXVI," Appendix to G. Yazdani. *Ajanta*. vol. 4. (London: Oxford University Press, 1955); Vasudev Vishnu Mirashi and P. Sreenivasachar. *The Ghatotkaca Cave Inscription*. (Hyderabad: The Archaeological Department, Government of Hyderabad, 1952); Dinesh Candra Sircar. "Inscription in Cave IV at Ajaṇṭā," *Epigraphia Indica*. 33 (1959-60): 259-262; Vasudev Vishnu Mirashi. *The Inscriptions of the Vākāṭakas*. Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum vol. V. (Ooctamund: Government Epigraphist for India, 1963); M. K. Dhavalikar. "New Inscriptions from Ajaṇṭā," *Ars Orientalis*. 7 (1968): 147-153; A. Ghosh. "Two Early Brahmi Records from Ajaṇṭā," *Epigraphia Indica*. 37 (1967): 241-244; Schlingloff. *Studies in the Ajaṇṭā Paintings*. See appendix A for Ajaṇṭā's and Ghaṭotkaca's 99 inscriptions. This number for these sister sites' epigraphs is derived from my collection of materials based upon published sources and *in situ* investigations. The 99 include both readable and unreadable records, as well as inscriptions noticed by prior scholars that no longer exist due to time and wear. When time permits, I anticipate publishing this collection as a separate monograph with interpretive and historical notes.

[11] Burgess. *Notes on the Bauddha Rock-Temples of Ajanta,* 2.

[12] William Erskine. "Observations on the Remains of the Bouddhists in India," *Transactions of the Bombay Literary Society*. 3 (1823): 494-537.

some of the doctrines and mythologies particular to Buddhism, as well as a sense of its place in India's broader religious history, had to be disseminated within the wider scholarly community.

Although Erskine included Ajaṇṭā in his report on "Bouddhist remains" he does not comment directly upon this site's religious provenance. Nevertheless, through James Prinsep's reproduction of a conversation held at the caves in 1828 between one Mr. Ralph and a Dr. James Bird, we learn that Erskine may have believed these cave temples to belong to the Jains. During this 1828 trip to Ajaṇṭā, Dr. Bird (who "swore by" Erskine) had the caves' Jain provenance *confirmed* for him by a brahman who, unable to make any sense of the *brāhmī* inscriptions, supposed them to be written by the Jains.[13]

This confusion is clarified in Dr. Bird's subsequent publication on Ajaṇṭā, *Historical Researches on the Origin and Principle of the Bauddha and Jaina Religions,* which was composed soon after his encounter with Mr. Ralph, but not published until 1847. In this work, Bird bespoke the Buddhist provenance of the Ajaṇṭā caves. Nevertheless, Bird's descriptive accounts of individual caves makes clear that he saw Jaina iconography throughout the site: the shape of the Cave 19 (designated by Bird as No. 6. West) stūpa's cupola (*harmika*) suggested "the symbol of *Malli* or the 19th Jaina;"[14] the antelopes on the front of the Cave 20 Buddha's lion throne represented "*Santi* the 16th Jaina saint;"[15] the state of a shrine image's habilitation, whether it appears naked or clothed, indicated the sect allegiance of the cave's donor, "*Digambara* or *Swetabara*."[16] In point of fact, the admixture of Jainism and Buddhism Bird found at Ajaṇṭā betokened what he called, the

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[13] Prinsep. "Facsimiles of Various Ancient Inscriptions," 560.

[14] Bird. *Historical Researches,* 15.

[15] Bird. *Historical Researches,* 15.

[16] Bird. *Historical Researches,* 72.

"Jaina form of Buddhism."[17] That is to say, Bird imagined that our present-day distinction between Jainism and Buddhism is the product of an ancient schism in the Buddhist community: "Jains" are those Buddhists who "retain[ed] part of the Brahmanical mythology and distinction of cast,"[18] whereas "Buddhists" are the heirs of those members of the more ancient continuum who split from Brāhmaṇism completely.

Another early visitor was Lieutenant James Edward Alexander, 16th Lancers, of the Order of the Lion and the Sun, who ventured to the caves in 1824. Like Bird, Alexander imagined a certain institutional continuity between the Jains and Buddhist in contradistinction to Brāhmaṇism. Yet he was also well aware of Ajaṇṭā's Buddhist provenance. Still, Alexander's musings are interesting, and not only for their regimental brass and Indiana Jonesesque intrigue. This lively report illuminates, in caricature, another possible pitfall in the study of Ajaṇṭā. To wit, Alexander's appalling -- albeit understandable -- ignorance of Buddhist history resulted in a skewed perception of the site's time of creation. Taking Ajaṇṭā as the production of Buddhism's golden age in India, he opines that they must "be nearer three than two thousand years [of age]."[19] For in Alexander's opinion Buddhism was on the decline by the period of Alexander the Great's conquest in 327 B.C. -- the Buddhists being subsequently scattered to Ceylon, Siam, Burma and China by the followers of Brahma "who are fond of glitter and shew, and who dazzled by the splendour of present rites, turned from these plain and unadorned figures of Buddha, to the mysterious Trimurti, and wonderworking Avatárs."[20]

The next stage of scholarship on the caves was carried out by scholars. The

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[17] Bird. *Historical Researches,* 17.

[18] Bird. *Historical Researches,* 17.

[19] James Edward Alexander. "Notice of a Visit to the Cavern Temples of Adjunta in the East Indies," *Transactions of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland.* 2 (1830): 366.

[20] Alexander. "Notice of a Visit," 366.

archaeologists James Fergusson and James Burgess provided the first comprehensive and systematic surveys of Ajaṇṭā's art and architecture in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. By this date, Lieutenant (now General) Alexander's romp through Ajaṇṭā was accepted for the fun it was, and Bird's notions were held in disrepute. In three separate publications Burgess repeats that "the erroneousness of [Bird's] opinions on Buddhism is only matched by the inaccuracies of the drawings that illustrate it."[21] And so these scholars eschewed the notion of an institutional continuity between Jainism and Buddhism: "All the caves there [at Ajaṇṭā] belong exclusively to the Buddhist religion without any admixture from the Hindu or Jaina forms of faith."[22]

Indeed, Fergusson's and Burgess's work was carried out long enough after Brian Hodgson introduced the West to "Northern Buddhism" in 1837, and Burnouf published his landmark *Introduction à l'histoire du Buddhisme Indien* in 1844, for stereotyped characterizations of Buddhism to have filtered into the discourse on Ajaṇṭā. These archaeologists treated Ajaṇṭā as realizations in stone of what they understood as canonical or normative Buddhist doctrines. Thus Burgess reflected, "The appearance of a colossal Buddha in the cell behind almost every vihāra, as well as his frequent representation in other positions, must at first site appear at variance with the spirit of Buddhist doctrine, which dispenses with all idolatrous forms."[23] On the positive side, the caves' sylvan setting was taken to confirm the doctrinally sanctioned longings of their resident-excavators. This we read in a winsome example of Victorian prose:

> The perfect seclusion of this wild ravine, with its loft walls of rock, had attracted to it the devotees of Buddhism, perhaps nineteen centuries ago or

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[21] Burgess. "The Ajaṇṭā Caves," 274; Burgess. *Notes on the Bauddha Rock-Temples*, 1; Fergusson and Burgess. *Cave Temples of India*, 281. This last quip refers to the charming but monstrously inaccurate reproductions of Ajaṇṭā's statuary and paintings Bird includes as an appendix to his work.

[22] Fergusson and Burgess. *Cave Temples of India*, 283.

[23] Burgess. "The Ajaṇṭā Caves," 274.

> more, as a fitting solitude in which to form a retreat from the distracting cares of an overbusy, soul-contaminating world. Here, alone with nature, the venerated *bhikshus* might devote their time to contemplation and self-restraint and instruct their novices, until the long-yearned-for *nirvāṇa* should extinguish life's flame, and, releasing them from the power of matter, permit them to enter upon the enjoyment of perfected knowledge and *nirvṛtti* -- everlasting repose -- undisturbed, as they pictured it, by feeling, or care, or dream. Here, amid scenes of nature's primeval activity, where, through long ages, water had been exercising its potent energies in cutting a way through the solid rock, leaving on each side giant scarps -- lofty perpendicular walls of rock -- puny man, fired with a longing for true Rest, with untiring perseverance and astonishing boldness, chiselled out of the living rock these spacious pillared chambers, these long-deserted retreats and temples, that so excite our wonder and curiosity as monuments of ages whose history is shrouded in the mists of the remote Past.[24]

Although we will want to consider the historical accuracy of Fergusson and Burgess's characterizations of Buddhism, as well as the analytic value thereof for excavating Ajaṇṭā's religious matrix, there can be no doubt that this advance in the general knowledge of Buddhism had a vast impact upon analyses of the caves. In 1843 Fergusson "would willingly give precedence"[25] to Bird's work, were it not so tardy in publication. Indeed, Fergusson believed that his work and that of Bird would complement each other, for Bird's "conclusions are drawn principally from the inscriptions and written authorities," while Fergusson's own were "arrived at almost entirely from a critical survey of the whole series, and a careful comparison of one cave with another."[26] Thirty-seven years later, in 1880, the good Dr. Bird is dispensed with, Fergusson's early archaeological approach and Bird's textual being fused in Fergusson and Burgess's monumental *The Cave Temples of India.*

A critical moment was reached when these two scholars appropriated categories from Buddhist textual tradition to serve as categories descriptive of strata in the

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[24] Burgess. "The Ajaṇṭā Caves," 269.

[25] James Fergusson. "On the Rock-Cut Temples of India," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland.* 8 (1846): 31.

[26] Fergusson. "On the Rock-Cut Temples of India," 31.

archaeological record. That is, in 1843 Fergusson presented a relative chronology of the caves based upon his "critical surveys" and "careful comparisons." In 1880, the relative chronology had not much changed, but now it is analyzed into two periods, the "Hīnayāna" (whose caves are "generally plain in style, and devoid of images of Buddha for worship"[27]) and the "Mahāyāna" (whose caves' essential characteristic is a "multiplications of images of Buddha"[28]). Thus Fergusson, Burgess, and nearly all scholars who have subsequently written on Indian Buddhist caves take as a given that the hallmark of a later cave is the presence of a Buddha image, and that such caves were produced by and for Mahāyāna Buddhists.

Following the work of Fergusson and Burgess, the next stage of investigation focused upon identification of the narratives recounted in Ajaṇṭā's singular paintings. Our two archaeologists were able to recognize some scenes from the Buddha's life and famed personages from the pantheon such as Avalokiteśvara and Tārā. But the precise significance of many icons and most narrative paintings escaped them. In 1892 Waddell established that the series of concentric circles divided into compartments, known to previous observers as the 'Zodiac,' was in fact the *bhāvacakra*, the Wheel of Existence, known from contemporary Tibetan art. S. F. Oldenberg published several identifications of *jātaka* scenes based upon descriptions of the caves provided in Burgess's *Notes on the Bauddha Rock-Temples of Ajanta.* H. Lüders made a major contribution when he positively identified several verses painted in Cave 2 as coming from Ārya Śūra's *Jātakamālā*; unfortunately almost nothing is known of this Buddhist text's author or the circumstances of its composition. E. B. Cowell's edition of the Pāli *jātakas* in six volumes of translations was published between 1895 and 1907. And it was only after this achievement that further

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[27] Fergusson and Burgess. *Cave Temples of India*, 170.

[28] Fergusson and Burgess. *Cave Temples of India*, 297.

progress in the job of identification was made, when Albert Foucher visited Ajaṇṭā for several weeks in 1919 and assigned names to about twenty tales. Although Foucher used the Pāli *jātaka* collection to support his findings, there is no evidence that this anthology was known to Ajaṇṭā's community. Thus M. Lalou brought us a giant-step closer to that community when she determined that three of the paintings Foucher identified actually represented versions of these stories recorded in the Dulva, the Tibetan Buddhist *vinaya*. Ghulam Yazdani's four-volume *Ajaṇṭā* made good use of Foucher's findings as a basis for the most in-depth and detailed descriptions of the paintings still extant in the mid part of our century. Although Yazdani's explanations are often superb, one must beware of his descriptions of scenes and icons that are not based upon previous scholars' work. At the end of this line of scholars stands Dieter Schlingloff, whose work has shown that both the *Jātakamālā* and the *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya* were better known at Ajaṇṭā than previously thought, as well as linking to the caves the *Lalitavistara*, Aśvaghoṣa's *Saundarānanda*, the *Kalpānamaṇḍitikā* of Kumāralāta, the *Divyāvadāna*, and a little known text found in Qyzyl, Central Asia, known affectionately as *MQR 1069*.

The most recent tier of scholarship on Ajaṇṭā has been dominated by Spink's meticulous examinations of the site's chronology. Other post-Burgess chronologers have included Philippe Stern, Wayne Begley, Vasudev Vishnu Mirashi, Sheila Weiner, and Karl Khandalawala. Joanna Williams' excellent summary of several of these scholars' chronologies should be consulted by anyone interested in pursuing the topic.[29] I would add the caveat, however, that Williams' analysis is highly critical, and reveals lacunae or questionable assumptions in each of these scholar's work, without herself venturing any positive solutions to these intractable difficulties. Williams shows herself to be less interested in arriving at a workable chronological framework for Ajaṇṭā's artifacts than in configuring

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[29] Joanna G. Williams. *The Art of Gupta India: Empire and Province*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).

this body of material as "representing the most distinctive Gupta regional substyle of the late fifth and early sixth centuries,"[30] making it an adequate source for her own work.

Towards a Relative Chronology

The preceding sketch of scholarship on Ajaṇṭā provides a background against which to address the first of the prolegomena necessary for recovering Ajaṇṭā's Buddhism. A blueprint for the sequence of the Ajaṇṭā caves' excavation and decoration is the *sine qua non* for any detailed discussion of the religious beliefs, practices, and expectations of those who paid for or resided at the caves. Without a chronology by means of which iconographic, artistic, and architectural developments can be gauged relative to each other, a comprehensive understanding of the circumstances surrounding Ajaṇṭā's patronage would remain a distant goal. Patronage being a relationship of economics and politics as much as of religion, without knowing the events that affected the social lives of Ajaṇṭā's patrons, one can little hope to fathom their religious expressions. This chapter will only concern itself with events on the macro-structural level, with politics, wars, and the like that affected Vākāṭaka society as a whole, not with the commonplace anxieties of human life -- infertility, poverty, demons -- that also doubtless shaped Ajaṇṭā's patrons and their caves.

The investigation of Ajaṇṭā's chronology and history will proceed in several steps. First I explain my reasons for accepting Spink's work as a starting point, and present his reconstruction of Ajaṇṭā's history. Following this treatment of Spink, I turn to the facts that may be gleaned from Vākāṭaka inscriptions and other evidence which provides documentary evidence bearing on Ajaṇṭā's history. To preface my argument, I find that Spink takes a faulty piece of evidence -- a verse from Cave 17's donative inscription read

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[30] Williams. *The Art of Gupta India,* 186.

wrongly by V. V. Mirashi -- as the fulcrum of his historical reconstruction. It is not my intention to re-invent the wheel: this chapter is not meant to replace Spink's work, but to complement it. Although a revision of Spink's history is necessary, in my own reconstruction I attempt to preserve as much as possible the assumptions and facts which underlie Spink's representation of Ajaṇṭā's history. The final section of this chapter reconstructs a history for Ajaṇṭā parallel to that of Spink, albeit one which finds in the crucial verse from Cave 17 radically different implications than those proposed by Mirashi and elaborated by Spink.

Prior to Spink's chronology of nineteen years, the dominant temporal sequence for the Ajaṇṭā's caves was set by Fergusson and Burgess. These two scholars set the site's "Mahāyāna" period "between the years 500 and 650, with a very little margin either way before or after these dates."[31] Fergusson and Burgess further subdivided this one hundred and fifty year span into two periods, earlier and later. Most notably, if one checks the individual caves the two include within each of these periods against a site map, one discovers that local position on the scarp was the dominant factor in their determination of this sequence. For Fergusson and Burgess, Caves 16 and 17 at the center of the Waghora's horseshoe, were the earliest "Mahāyāna" caves, Caves 1 and 26 at the periphery, the latest (cf. Fig. 1). Although the significance of this observation may seem arcane at present, it is an important point to which I will return.

The next scholar to seriously address Ajaṇṭā's chronology was Philippe Stern. This French scholar visited Ajaṇṭā in 1935, and taught a revised chronology based upon his findings at the École du Louvre, which he finally published in 1972. Attempting to be firm, even scientific, Stern pioneered a methodology known as motival analysis, described by Joanna Williams as follows:

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[31] Fergusson and Burgess. *Cave Temples of India*, 299.

> Elements are isolated and placed in a convincing sequence of development in their own terms, on the supposition that it is more objective to deal systematically with parts than with the complex whole. That whole may, as a final stage, be dated on the basis of this relative sequence.[32]

In fact, Stern limited his object of study to the developmental sequence of Ajaṇṭā's pillar forms, and he did not even attempt the "final stage," setting an absolute chronology. Without getting involved in the details, here I would call attention to the fact that Stern divided the site's chronology into several subsets, with the felicitous result that the relative sequence of caves based upon columnar motifs is directly echoed by the caves' relative positions on mountain scarp.[33] Again, Caves 16 and 17 are among first in Ajaṇṭā's Vākāṭaka period.

Another post-Fergusson-&-Burgess chronologer was Wayne Begley. Unlike Stern, Begley was interested in establishing an absolute as well as relative framework for the caves. Begley rejected Stern's motival analysis. Instead, he focused upon "historical, inscriptional, and stylistic evidence,"[34] which led Begley to a chronology spanning one and one half centuries, between approximately 450 and 600 C.E.

Comparing these chronologies with each other, and with the starting point for the various caves on Spink's time-line (Fig. 2), one will discover that all more or less concur upon the relative order for the sequence in which the caves were *begun*. However, the more significant question is that of the progression of work within each individual cave after it was begun. Spink is the only scholar to have addressed this latter issue with any degree of sophistication. Like these other scholars, Spink recognizes a certain periodicity to the site. But, rather than establishing a base-line criterion for the inception of a cave, which is then treated as the only important chronological marker, Spink was the first to

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[32] Williams. *Art of Gupta India*, 6.

[33] Stern. *Les Colonnes*, 14.

[34] Begley. *Chronology of Mahāyāna Buddhist Architecture,* 3.

explicate the full course of each cave's development as an historical whole. Spink's methodology, a variation on "la méthode Stern,"[35] diverges from that of Stern in the range of detail its analysis incorporates. Not only does Spink draw on a wealth of material evidence, which includes the full range of motival and iconographical forms as well as technical features like wall thicknesses and ceiling heights, plaster types, door-frame features, and especially door hinges, but Spink is even further ranging than Stern in his treatment of pillar forms. Spink also diverges from Begley in that, by employing "la méthode Stern," he uses motival analyses to fathom the artistic and architectural material in their own depths before setting them within a historical context based upon epigraphic and textual gleanings.

The most crucial of Spink's discoveries was that "an analysis of the style and iconography of the Ajaṇṭā caves shows that the majority of excavations started [in the first years of work] were . . . executed in two clearly definable phases, one of which is distinctly early and the other distinctly late."[36] As an example of Spink's interpretation, let us compare his explication of the development of Cave 15 with that of Begley. Begley believed Cave 15 "may be the earliest Mahāyāna excavation."[37] But Begley was also confounded by an inability to explain why this cave's early features "appear[ed] in conjunction with some puzzlingly anomalous or later features."[38] Cave 15's porch door frame is a case in point (Fig. 3): the lintel, whose *candraśālās* are generally associated with the latest door frames, sit incongruously upon the heads of goddesses positioned as those found in the earliest doors. Comparing this door frame with that of Cave 16 (Fig. 4) and

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[35] Walter M. Spink. Review article: "Les Colonnes Indiennes d'Ajaṇṭā et d'Ellora," *Journal of the American Oriental Society.* 94 (1974): 487.

[36] Spink. "Ajaṇṭā's Chronology: The Crucial Cave," 165.

[37] Begley. *Chronology of Mahāyāna Buddhist Architecture,* 93.

[38] Begley. *Chronology of Mahāyāna Buddhist Architecture,* 93.

Cave 23 (Fig. 5), agreed to be early and late respectively, one sees just how jarring this composition in Cave 15 is. Begley notes other similar discrepancies, but, having no interpretive scheme, thereafter ignores them. Spink's chronology was a breakthrough in that it provides an interpretation of why this cave's door looks like somebody carved the frame's lower half, stopped for a period of years, and then decided to finish the job using the site's latest idiom.

Cave 15 is by no means unique in having both early and late features as programmatic structural (as opposed to intrusive minor) elements. Let me explicate this point further, for the observation that many caves appear to have been worked upon in two distinct stages is the crucial discovery of Spink's relative chronology and the underpinning of his historical reconstruction. Attempting to explain the widespread phenomenon of individual caves at the site having both "early" and "late" features, Spink designates Cave 16 as the "crucial cave." This vihāra provides a linchpin for Spink's chronology because it possesses a detailed donative inscription, which attributes the cave's programmatic excavation and decoration to a single donor, the Vākāṭaka minster Varāhadeva. Unlike Begley, who used inscriptions largely for their paleographic content, for Spink the inscription is first a relative feature: "there seems every reason to assume . . . that the cave was essentially complete when Varāhadeva's donative record was written."[39] The inscription allows Spink to determine that all the major features of Cave 16 can be set within at most the span of a single man's adult life. If this cave can be shown to share in features determined to be morphologically early and late by comparison with counterparts elsewhere at the site, then Ajaṇṭā's entire chronology can also be set within the absolute span of a single man's adult life. To demonstrate that Cave 16 was begun near the start of the Vākāṭaka phase, Spink appeals to the cave's central position on the scarp -- it was the

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[39] Spink. "Ajaṇṭā's Chronology: The Crucial Cave," 143.

"center [from which] the site gradually spread out as it developed"[40] -- and its "early" motival features such as the mimicry of architectural forms necessary to structural architecture -- beams and cross beams -- in the ceiling of the front aisle. More completely, "the form of its pillars, cells, doorways, windows, and many of its characteristically early paintings establishes its connections with other very early caves," as does "the simple and 'formative' nature of its basic plan."[41] All this, according to Spink, "had often been noticed." Indeed, Fergusson and Burgess, Stern, and Begley alike all position this cave near the beginning of their relative sequences of cave development. What sets Spink's analysis of this cave apart, what makes his chronology short, is that he also finds some of the very latest motival elements in this same cave *as part of its programme*.[42]

At this point I have claimed that Spink's chronology provides better data than his fellow chronologers for reconstructing a history of Ajaṇṭā's patronage because he alone interprets the internal development within individual caves. But I have enumerated only two stages in Cave 16's (which is emblematic of the site's) development. Spink can be far more precise. He explains,

> Because the excavations of the Vākāṭaka phase at Ajaṇṭā . . . are so abundantly rich in forms and features, because the upper and lower limits are so close in time, and because of the many revealing connections with known historical events, the most practical and informative way to describe the development of the site, and to read its story, is year by year. Thus, I have divided the Vākāṭaka development . . . into nineteen separate annual levels.[43]

More general and useful for this study is Spink's analysis of the site into five distinct levels. He identifies these levels through "five very distinct points of rupture that can be found in

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[40] Spink. "Ajaṇṭā's Chronology: The Crucial Cave," 150.

[41] Spink. "Ajaṇṭā's Chronology: The Crucial Cave," 150.

[42] See Spink "Ajaṇṭā's Chronology: The Crucial Cave," 150-156 for an enumeration of all Cave 16's late features.

[43] Spink. "The Archaeology of Ajaṇṭā," 70.

the overall development of the site;"[44] each point of rupture denotes a "drastic temporal break . . . leaving a spectrum of unfinished or just-finished forms and features."[45] This quinta-partite chronological scheme provides the framework for the examination of Ajaṇṭā's history that follows. Accordingly, let us now review in synopsis these five stages in the history of Ajaṇṭā's patronage. In point of fact, in line with the method of motival analysis, I will summarize Spink's chronology twice. Presently, I treat the relative evidence through which Spink determines and divides the five periods; the second time around, I will read the history of Ajaṇṭā's patronage as a story, reviewing Spink's reconstructed absolute chronology which represents the relative evidence through the filter of epigraphic and literary sources.

Period 1) The first period is characterized by an exuberance of creative activity, during which the vast majority of caves were begun, and several nearly finished. In terms of patronage, Spink's reading of the site suggests that each cave was individually funded by a single donor, a pattern that stands in stark contrast to the collective patronage found at the earliest Buddhist sites like Sāñcī[46] and Bhārhut[47] where individuals, religious-associations, and whole towns severally donated capital to be applied towards programmatic structural elements. This new pattern of patronage is indeed suggested by the site's epigraphical evidence: every inscription recording the donation of a full cave presents its donor in the singular.[48]

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[44] Spink. "The Archaeology of Ajaṇṭā," 70.

[45] Spink. "The Archaeology of Ajaṇṭā," 70.

[46] Vidya Dehejia. "The Collective and Popular Basis of Early Buddhist Patronage: Sacred Monuments, 100 BC-AD 250." In *The Powers of Art: Patronage in Indian Culture*. Ed. by Barbara Stoler Miller. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992): 35-45.

[47] Heinrich Lüders. *Brāhmī Inscription from Bhārhut*. Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, vol II, pt. II. (Ootacamund: Government Epigraphist for India, 1963).

[48] Cf. app. A, Nos. 17, 67, 77, 84, 93, 98 for Caves 4, 16, 17, 20, 26, and Ghaṭotkaca respectively.

Period 2) Apparently something happened to the Vākāṭaka realm, either economically or politically, for the end of this period of efflorescence is marked by rushed and expedient work site-wide, followed by a general cessation of all activity at Ajaṇṭā. The only exceptions to this stoppage, seem to have been Caves 1, 17, 19, and 20. During this latter period, the last three were nearly finished, albeit in a rush, but ultimately remained incomplete.

Hiatus) Following this general interruption, the site seems to have gone into complete remission for several years. In line with his emphasis on the singularity of patronage and the presence of an overarching bureaucracy regulating the site, Spink observes:

> Not a single image of any type whatsoever was added to any of the caves at the site during the Hiatus. This does not so much suggest the site's abandonment during this period -- except of course by the craftsmen, who could find no work there -- as it does its continued occupation and preservation of the insistent exclusiveness that had characterized the site's patronage from the start. How strong and how effective the administrative control was during this troubled time becomes clear when we contrast it with the total anarchy that reigned during the Period of Disruption, when the major patrons had lost their rights and privileges and anyone could put any image almost anywhere.[49]

Periods 3 & 4) Following the hiatus, work started up again in earnest. After several years, however, the site seems to have suffered another sharp blow, for once again there is a period of rushed activity, culminating in the abandonment of most caves in a stage of incompleteness.

Period 5) Finally, whether it is because the Vākāṭaka bureaucratic structure fell away, or because the caves en masse were handed over to the Buddhist saṅgha, which willingly allowed individual donations within the caves, after the abrupt halt of the programmatic period, an intrusive phase began. The majority of minor iconic figures ranging haphazardly around the site date, as well as all non-programmatic donative

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[49] Spink. "The Archaeology of Ajaṇṭā," 81.

inscriptions may derive from this second major division of Ajaṇṭā's history. This phase also ended abruptly. The site was abandoned, after which date (set by Spink as 480) "not a painting, not a piece of sculpture, not a cave, or a cell, or a cistern, nor a single donative inscription"[50] was created at Ajaṇṭā.

I have had the good fortune to spend several months at Ajaṇṭā with Walter Spink, during which time we passed many days discussing the fine details supporting his chronology. As a result of these encounters, I would affirm that Spink has come close indeed to realizing the general outlines of Ajaṇṭā's development revealed through "comparable morphological, iconographical, and technological features spreading horizontally throughout the caves."[51] However, Spink has also used "inscriptions and the narratives of these times"[52] to bring these physical remains to life. I avoided incorporating any of this story in my preceding elaboration of the relative chronology, for the tale Spink tells of Ajaṇṭā's history cannot be accepted as readily as the abstract developmental sequence upon which it is based. This history will be the focus of the next sub-section. In deriving this history, I will take the following as an accepted principle: "the history of the times depends upon the evidence of the caves just as much as the history of the caves depends upon that of the times."[53]

Relative to What?

Evidence for dating the caves is sorely lacking. Positive data for setting an absolute chronology is found in only three places: Caves 16's and 17's dedicatory inscriptions link

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[50] Walter M. Spink. "Before the Fall: Pride and Piety at Ajanta." In *The Powers of Art: Patronage in Indian Culture*. Ed. by Barbara Stoler Miller. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992): 67.

[51] Spink. "The Archaeology of Ajaṇṭā," 70.

[52] Spink. "The Archaeology of Ajaṇṭā," 70.

[53] Spink. "The Archaeology of Ajaṇṭā," 70.

them both to the reign of the Vākāṭaka ruler Hariṣeṇa,[54] and Hsüan-tsang reports that the famed Buddhist logician Dignāga often visited the site.[55] I will treat these facts below, as I attempt to erect an historical framework within which to study the Ajaṇṭā caves.

The starting point for any discussion of Ajaṇṭā's absolute chronology must be the regnal years of the Vākāṭaka king Hariṣeṇa. We know that Varāhadeva, Cave 16's donor, "became a counsellor of king . . . Hariṣeṇa;" and we know Cave 17's donor "whose store of merit is truly amazing . . . adorned the earth with stūpas and vihāras . . . while Hariṣeṇa . . . protects . . . [the land]."

Hariṣeṇa was the last known monarch from the Vākāṭakas, a lineage of kings who ruled large swaths of Central India following the dissolution of the Śātavāhana empire in the mid-third century.[56] There is little agreement among scholars as to the original home of

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[54] Cf. app. A, No. 67, verse 17 and No. 77, verse 21.

[55] Hsüan-Tsang. *Si-Yu Ki*, vol. 2, 259; Watters. *On Yuan Chwang's Travels*, vol. 2, 240.

[56] An overview of Vākāṭaka historiography can be found in Shankar Goyal. "The Progress of Vākāṭaka Historiography." In *The Age of the Vākāṭakas*. Ed. by Ajay Mitra Shastri. (New Delhi: Harman Publishing, 1992): 397-308. For general histories of the Vākāṭakas see Ghulam Yazdani (ed). *The Early History of the Deccan*. (New Delhi: Oriental Reprint, 1982); Mirashi. *Inscriptions of the Vākāṭakas*; Ramesh Chandra Majumdar and Anant Sadashiv Altekar. *The Vākāṭaka-Gupta Age, Circa 200-550 A.D.* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1967); Nisar Ahmed. "A Re-examination of the Genealogy and Chronology of the Vākāṭakas," *Indian Antiquary*. ser. 3.4 (1970): 149-164; Ramesh Chandra Majumdar and K. K. Dasgupta (eds). *A Compreshensive History of India, Volume 3 Part I, (A.D. 300-985)*. (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1981). These works are all based upon the epigraphic evidence available up until 1963. Since that date numerous Vākāṭaka records have been discovered, whose contents are summarized in Ajay Mitra Shastri. "New Vākāṭaka Inscriptions." In *The Age of the Vākāṭakas*. Ed. by A. M. Shastri. (New Delhi: Harman Publishing, 1992): 227-268.

the Vākāṭakas,[57] or the meaning of this family name,[58] but epigraphic[59] and *purāṇic*[60] sources alike name Vindhyaśakti as the family progenitor (see Fig. 6 for the Vākāṭaka genealogy). Vindhyaśakti's son, Pravarasena I, is deemed the greatest of the Vākāṭakas: his campaigns appear to have expanded Vindhyaśakti's kingdom to such an extent that Pravarasena I was empowered to perform Vedic Vajapeya sacrifices, the Soma sacrifice seven times, as well as four Aśvamedha sacrifices, and to adopt for himself the highest imperial title, *Samrāṭ*. According to the *Purāṇas*, Pravarasena I had four sons, every one of whom became a king.[61]

Whatever the veracity of this report, we only know that Pravarasena I's unified Vākāṭaka empire was divided into at least two parts: one branch headed by Rudrasena I, the eldest son of Pravarasena's eldest son, Gautamīputra, who predeceased his father. The other branch, that of Hariṣeṇa, was headed by Sarvasena I. Rudrasena I's progeny ruled from first from Nandivardhana and later from Pravarapura, both in the present day Mahārāṣṭra state. The descendants of Sarvasena I had their capital in Vatsagulma,[62] from

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[57] K. P. Jayaswal. *History of India, 150 A.D. to 350 A.D.* (Delhi: Low Price Publications, 1990); Mirashi. *Inscriptions of the Vākāṭakas*; Ajay Mitra Shastri. "The Vākāṭakas: Original Home and Some Other Problems." In *The Age of the Vākāṭakas*. Ed. by Ajay Mitra Shastri. (New Delhi: Harman Publishing, 1992): 1-20; S. V. Sohoni. "Original Territory of the Vākāṭaka Dynasty." In *The Age of the Vākāṭakas*. Ed. by Ajay Mitra Shastri. (New Delhi: Harman Publishing, 1992): 33-35.

[58] Mirashi. *Inscriptions of the Vākāṭakas*; K. V. Ramesh. "On the Vākāṭakas and their Inscriptions." In *The Age of the Vākāṭakas*. Ed. by Ajay Mitra Shastri. (New Delhi: Harman Publishing, 1992): 27-32; Shastri. "The Vākāṭakas: Original Home and Some Other Problems."

[59] Cf. app. A, No. 67; P. V. Parabrahma Sastry. "Hyderabad Plates of Vakataka Devasena, Year 5," *Journal of the Epigraphical Society of India*. 13 (1986): 71-75; Krishna Mohan Shrimali. *Agrarian Structure in Central India and the Northern Deccan (c. AD 300-500): A Study in Vākāṭaka Inscriptions*. (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1987): 82-3.

[60] Frederick Eden Pargiter. *The Purāṇa Text of the Dynasties of the Kali Age*. (Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1962): 48, 50, 72-73.

[61] Pargiter. *The Purāṇa Text of the Dynasties of the Kali Age*, 50, 73.

[62] For discussions of the meaning of *Vatsagulma* see Mirashi. *Inscriptions of the Vākāṭakas,* 96 and Ramesh. "On the Vākāṭakas and their Inscriptions," 29.

whence it does not seem to have moved (see Fig. 7 for a map of the Vākāṭaka heartlands). I will discuss both branches after the names of their respective capitals.

Because the Vākāṭaka kings generally dated their records in terms of regnal years, rather than according to the known eras of Indian history (the Śaka or Gupta for instance), the absolute dates of their individual suzerainty are difficult to determine. Two anchors are available. First, Rudrasena II, a king of the Nandivardhana branch, took as his principal wife Prabhāvatīgupta, a daughter of the mighty Gupta monarch Candragupta II, whose rule can be set at least between G.E. 61 (=380 C.E.) and G.E. 93 (=412 C.E.).[63] The Vākāṭaka chronology can thus be affixed to a definite century, at least.[64] Nevertheless, the regnal years of Rudrasena II are disputed, and so little is known of the other Vākāṭaka kings' regnal periods that this branch's chronology cannot be fixed without a margin of at least twenty-five years.[65] Further, even if this date were known with greater accuracy, the method of counting and calculating the generations of one branch of a ruling family to determine the chronology of the other is highly problematic, albeit one finds it often used in the writing of Indian history.

The second fact for setting a Vākāṭaka absolute chronology -- and a much better fact at that -- comes from the Hisse-Borālā stone-slab inscription.[66] Found near the sit of

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[63] D. R. Bhandarkar, B. C. Chhabra, and G. S. Gai. *Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings*. Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, volume III (revised). (New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1981): 52.

[64] Before this marriage alliance came to light, Fleet had dated Pravarasena II and Vākāṭakas to the seventh century (John Faithfull Fleet. *Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings and Their Successors*. Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, volume 3. [Varanasi, Indological Book House, 1970]: 16).

[65] Spink. "Reply to K. Khandalawala, A. Jamkhedkar, B. Deshpande," 21-24.

[66] V. B. Kolte. "Hisse-Borālā Inscription of Vākāṭaka King Devasena." In *Felicitation Volume* (=V. V. Mirashi Festschrift). Ed. by G. T. Deshpande et. al. (Nagpur: Vidarbha Samshodan Mandal, 1965); Sobhana Gokhale. "Hisse-Borala Inscription of Devasena, Saka 380," *Epigraphia Indica*. 37 (1967): 1-4; G. S. Gai and S. Sankaranarayanan. "Note on the Date of Hisse-Borala Inscription of the Time of Vakataka Devasena," *Epigraphia Indica*. 37 (1967): 5-8; Ajay Mitra Shastri. "Some Observations on the Hisse-Borala Inscription of Vākāṭaka Devasena." In *Umesha Mishra Commemoration Volume*. Ed by B. R. Saksena. (Allahabad: Ganganatha Jha Research Institute, 1970); Shrimali. *Agrarian Structure*,

ancient Vatsagulma, this slab records that Svāmilladeva, the executive officer of Rāja Śrī Devasena of the Vākāṭakas, set up a reservoir named Sudarśana for the benefit of all beings. This Devasena was Hariṣeṇa's father. But more importantly, this is the single Vākāṭaka record dated to a known era: Svāmilladeva's donation was made in the Śaka year 380 (= 457-8 C.E.).[67] We know further, from a copper-plate inscription found in Bidar, a northern district of Karnataka state, that Devasena reigned at least five years.[68]

One more piece of historical evidence is available for anchoring Ajaṇṭā's history. According to Hsüan-tsang, "in the old days Jina (*or* Channa) Bodhisattva often stopped in this *saṅghārāma*."[69] This Buddhist figure has been identified as the famed logician Dignāga. In addition to the other tales Hsüan-tsang tells of bodhisattva "Jina" that would make this identification secure, the Jain scholar Siṃhasūri calls Dignāga by the name Dinna,[70] homophonous with Jina of the Chinese.

Dignāga's dates are not known with any accuracy. According to Siṃhasūri, Vasubandhu was Dignāga's personal teacher (*svaguru*). This tradition is also recorded in the Tibetan sources: the *Blue Annals* (1478 C.E.) place Dignāga after Vasubandhu in the lineage of Abhidharma masters;[71] Bu-ston (†14th c.) presents Vasubandhu as Dignāga's

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81; Shastri. "New Vākāṭaka Inscriptions," 246-7.

[67] When this record was first discovered a controversy raged as to whether it does indeed include the word *Śaka*. Consensus has been reached in the affirmative. See Shastri. "New Vākāṭaka Inscriptions," 246-7 for a recapitulation of that discussion.

[68] Sastry. "Hyderabad Plates of Devasena;" Shastri. "New Vākāṭaka Inscriptions," 248-251.

[69] Hsüan-Tsang. *Si-Yu Ki*, vol. 2, 259.

[70] Masaaki Hattori. *Dignāga, On Perception.* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968): 3, n.9.

[71] George N. Roerich (trans). *The Blue Annals*. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988): 346.

principal teacher early in his life;[72] Tāranātha (in 1608 C.E.) recapitulates Bu-ston's tale.[73] The textual record supports placing Dignāga after Vasubandhu, as Dignāga was clearly familiar with Vasubandhu's corpus, and composed an abridgement of Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośa*, the *Abidharmakośavṛttimarmadīpa*. However, none of the Chinese eye-witnesses make any mention of this relationship, although Hsüan-tsang and I-Tsing discuss both figures. In any event, Vasubandhu is generally dated (now-a-days) to c. 400-480 C.E.,[74] which would place Dignāga's active period to sometime after 450 C.E.

Because of the uncertain relationship between Vasubandhu and Dignāga, scholars have also investigated his position relative to several other major figures of Indian philosophy. Besides post-dating Vasubandhu, according to the major studies of Dignāga by Frauwallner and Hattori, Dignāga must ante-date Dharmapāla (c. 510-570), who cites him. Dignāga's life-span can be further narrowed through his position relative to the grammarian Bhartṛhari. Both Hattori and Frauwallner situate Dignāga as Bhartṛhari's junior: the Buddhist logician models one of his earliest works (the *Trikālaparīkṣā*) upon Bhartṛhari's *Vākyapadīyam*, and Dignāga cites this same text in his last composition, the

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[72] Bu-ston. *The History of Buddhism in India and Tibet by Bu ston.* Trans. by E. Obermiller. (Delhi: Sri Satguru, 1987): 149.

[73] Tāranātha. *Tāranātha's History of Buddhism in India.* Ed. and trans. by Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1990): 182.

[74] For several highlights in the literature concerning this major figure, who has variously been placed in the fourth century, the fifth century, and cleft into two -- a separate Vasubandhu for each century see Noel Peri. "À propos de la date de Vasubandhu," *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême Orient.* 11 (1911): 339-390; Erich Frauwallner. *On the Date of the Buddhist Master of the Law, Vasubandhu.* (Rome: Instituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1951); Padmanabh S. Jaini. "On the Theory of Two Vasubandhus," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies.* 21 (1958): 48-53; Erich Frauwallner. "Landmarks in the History of Indian Logic," *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Sud- und Ostasiens und Archiv für Indische Philosophie.* 5 (1961): 129-134; Shri Ram Goyal. *A History of the Imperial Guptas.* (Allahabad: Central Book Depot, 1967): 214-6; Vasubandhu. *Seven Works of Vasubandhu, the Buddhist Psychological Doctor.* Ed. and trans. by Stephen Anacker. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984): 7-28; José Pereira and Francis Tiso. "The Life of Vasubandhu According to Recent Research," *East and West.* 37 (1987): 451-454; and Marek Mejor. *Vasubandhu's Abhidharmakośa and the Commentaries Preserved in the Tanjur.* Alt- und Neu-Indische Studien herausgegeben vom Institüt für Kultur und Geschichte Indiens und Tibets an der Universität Hamburg, No. 42. (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1991).

Pramāṇasamuccaya.

Just as Dignāga's dates are established by reference to those of his teacher Vasubandhu, so Bhartṛhari's dates are delimited by reference to those of his teacher, Vasurāta. In point of fact, Vasurāta and Vasubandhu were known to each other: both belonged to the Gupta court's inner circle. According to Paramārtha, late in life Vasubandhu debated a grammarian named Vasurāta, who was also the brother-in-law of the Gupta king, Bālāditya. Moreover, Vasubandhu was the mentor of this same Bālāditya. These figures' involvement in Bālāditya's court provides an anchor for Vasubandhu's and Bhartṛhari's dates, since this Gupta emperor was probably Narasiṃhagupta I, whose reign may be dated to a few years starting in 469 C.E.[75] Because Vasurāta was Bālāditya's brother-in-law, Frauwallner suggests that Vasurāta "could not have been an old man"[76] when he debated Vasubandhu. Accepting Frauwallner's interpretation would force us to push Dignāga's period of activity to the early to mid-sixth century. But why could Vasurāta not have been an old man when he debated Vasubandhu? One cannot specify Vasurāta's age at the time of his debate with Vasubandhu. Nevertheless, it does seem certain that the literary productions of Vasurāta's pupil, Bhartṛhari, should not be placed earlier than the 450s-460s,[77] and thus neither should the works of Dignāga.

Finally, Hattori and Frauwallner further narrow Dignāga's date by noting that he attacked the Sāṃkhya teacher Mādhava in the *Pramāṇasamuccaya.* This same Mādhava is

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[75] Goyal. *A History of the Imperial Guptas*, 317.

[76] Frauwallner. "Landmarks in the History of Indian Logic," 135.

[77] George Cardona (*Panini: A Survey of Research*. [The Hague: Mouton, 1976]: 298-9) offers an excellent review of the many opinions concerning Bhartṛhari's dates. Here, Cardona suggests that Bhartṛhari "lived no later than the fifth century." But, he also cites a tradition that would put the grammarian as early as the fourth century, for it is thought by some that Bhartṛhari is referred to in the work of a Mallavādin, a Jain logician traditionally dated to 357/8.

said, by Hsüan-tsang, to have debated Guṇamati, the teacher of Sthiramati (c. 510-570).[78] As the *Pramāṇasamuccaya* is considered Dignāga's final work, it could easily have been composed sometime in or around the first decade of the sixth century.

In brief, the dates of 480-540 C.E. suggested by Frauwallner[79] or 470-530 C.E. by Hattori[80] are approximate at best, and Dignāga could well have been born c. 440. In the end, this investigation of Hsüan-tsang's testimony only suggests that the caves were in use somewhere between the mid-fifth and mid-sixth centuries: this is the last of our *definite* chronological facts.[81]

So far we have established that Ajaṇṭā's Vākāṭaka period coincided at least in part with the reign of Hariṣeṇa, and that Dignāga visited the site frequently some time between 450 and 550 C.E. At the same time, Spink claims the ability to resolve Ajaṇṭā's absolute chronology into a nineteen year period, and to be able to date every piece of evidence to an (approximately) specific moment within that span. Accordingly, the remainder of this subsection has two tasks: to review how Spink narrows this temporal range by filling in the historical details, and to assess evidence through which he accomplishes this task.

The year 458 C.E. provides a non-controversial *terminus post quem* for Hariṣeṇa's accession, since the Hisse-Borālā stone slab of that date names his father, Devasena, as the ruler. And because the Cave 16 inscription suggests that its patron, Varāhadeva, was already a counsellor of Mahārāja Hariṣeṇa when he began this vihāra, Spink understands the site's history to have taken place fully within the period of Hariṣeṇa's reign: "The

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[78] Hsüan-Tsang. *Si-Yu Ki,* vol. 2, 104-110; Watters. *On Yuan Chwang's Travels,* vol. 2, 108-9.

[79] Frauwallner. "Landmarks in the History of Indian Logic," 134.

[80] Hattori. *Dignāga,* 4, n. 21.

[81] Hajime Nakamura (*Indian Buddhism: A Survey with Bibliographical Notes*. [Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987]: 296) places Dignāga between c. 400 and 480 C.E., but it is not clear to me how he derived these dates and so I have not discussed them.

entrance of the great emperor Hariṣeṇa onto the stage of Indian history for his all-too-brief hour, and the fate that befell both him and the empire that he gathered, are part of the finally tragic story that Ajaṇṭā tells when we probe into it layer by layer."[82] More uncertain, but certainly possible, is Spink's statement that Hariṣeṇa ascended the throne in 460. Spink agrees this date is arbitrary, but avers it is "not *very* arbitrary,"[83] being no more than two years off. Consequent upon this date, the strata of Spink's short chronology are delineated thus: Phase 1) 462-468, Phase 2) 469- 471, Hiatus) 472-474, Phase 3) 475-476, Phase 4) 477, Phase 5) 479-480. By aligning the vicissitudes of Ajaṇṭā's art to those of the empire under Hariṣeṇa's suzerainty, Spink has made Hariṣeṇa's biography a crucial factor in Ajaṇṭā's chronology. If one assumes that Ajaṇṭā was excavated and decorated in this nineteen year period, the crucial question becomes, what were the historical triumphs and calamities whose traces are so evident in the multiple strata of Ajaṇṭā's record?

Spink begins with the assumption that the Ajaṇṭā region was not among the territories governed centrally from Vatsagulma, but, instead, was "among the extensive feudatory domains inherited by the new Vākāṭaka emperor when he succeeded to power."[84] Based upon this presupposition, he further suggests that the ruler of this locale was the Vākāṭaka feudatory responsible for Caves 17, 19, and 20;[85] following Mirashi, Spink names this territory as the kingdom of Ṛṣīka.[86] Based upon Mirashi's translation of verse 10 from Cave 17's dedicatory inscription, Spink proposes that shortly before the site's

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[82] Spink. "Archaeology of Ajaṇṭā," 69.

[83] Spink. "Archaeology of Ajaṇṭā," 70.

[84] Spink. "Archaeology of Ajaṇṭā," 72.

[85] Following Spink, I include Cave 20 in this list. But see my discussion in Chapter IV on Ajaṇṭā's programmatic patrons for my reservations concerning this identification.

[86] See Mirashi. *Inscriptions of the Vākāṭakas*, 123. This identification is problematic, and probably wrong. The location of Ṛṣīka is not crucial for the present discussion, however. I will therefore accept Spink's identification for the time being.

efflorescence of 462 the king responsible for Cave 17 engaged in and won a battle with the ruler of Aśmaka, another Vākāṭaka feudatory placed by Mirashi to the south-west.[87] For Spink's historical reconstruction, this pre-Ajaṇṭā dispute was to have major ramifications.

In fact, Spink portrays the site's development as a reflection of the relations and conflicts between the Ṛṣīka, Aśmaka, and Vākāṭaka kingdoms. Period 1 is initiated soon after dispute between this the kings of Ṛṣīka and Aśmaka. Period 2, characterized by rushed and expedient work, is said to have been occasioned by an Aśmaka attack against Ṛṣīka. The hiatus occurred when this conflict made the site uninhabitable. Period 3 was initiated by the resolution of this conflict, and ended with Hariṣeṇa's death, about which Spink suggests "considering the perverse machinations of the Aśmakas it may have been by poison or the knife."[88] Period 4 began with the site's patrons' realization that Aśmaka has designs upon the entire Vākāṭaka empire; these patrons therefore rushed their work towards completion. The final period, characterized by the loss of the site's bureaucratic structure, and consequent haphazard placement of intrusive imagery, began as the Aśmakas intensified their freedom-fight against the Vākāṭaka polity. The history of Ajaṇṭā Spink reconstructs based upon these few events can be summarized as follows:

- Period 1: Early 462-Late 468: Situated along a major North-South trade route, the region surrounding Ajaṇṭā is an object of contention between the Ṛṣīka dynasty to its north and the Aśmaka to its south. Some time before 462 the Ṛṣīkas take decisive control of the region, and with the support of the new suzerain, the Vākāṭaka overlord Hariṣeṇa, they enforce peace. Whereafter, the Ṛṣīka king (christened "Upendragupta" by Spink), Hariṣeṇa's prime-minister (named Varāhadeva), a monk named Buddhabhadra with ties to the Aśmakas, and other patrons of unknown affiliation serially initiate the excavation of cave monasteries for Buddhist monks.

- Period 2: Early 469-Late 471: Aśmaka attacks Ṛṣīka. This conflict stops work on all caves except those sponsored by the Ṛṣīka king and Hariṣeṇa himself. Many workmen go to Bāgh several hundred miles to the north; the decorative motifs of

[87] Mirashi. *Inscriptions of the Vākāṭakas,* 123. Whereas the name of the region ruled by Cave 17's donor is not necessarily pertinent, the location of Aśmaka is important and is treated below.

[88] Spink. "Archaeology of Ajaṇṭā," 82.

Bāgh's earliest phase are the same as Ajaṇṭā's second.

- Hiatus: Early 472-Late 474: The Ṛṣīka/Aśmaka conflict heightens and all work at Ajaṇṭā stops. It is important to note that during this period not only did no programmatic work continue on the caves, but no intrusive Buddha images, no "graffiti" as it were, were added either. This highlights an important facet of Ajaṇṭā's patronage. Namely, as long as a donor maintained an interest in the cave for which he paid, that excavation was treated as his exclusive property, and was not available for alteration or decoration by anybody else. A clear demarcation can be made between "programmatic" and "intrusive" periods and iconographies at Ajaṇṭā.

- Period 3: Early 475-Late 477: Aśmaka wins this time around. Work resumes in earnest, this time under Aśmaka supervision. This period ends with Hariṣeṇa's probably sudden, probably unexpected, death.

- Period 4: Early 478-Late 478: The shock of Hariṣeṇa's death, the evident weakness of his successor, and the recognized ambitions of Aśmaka to destroy the entire Vākāṭaka empire impels Ajaṇṭā's patrons to hurriedly complete and dedicate their caves.

- Period 5: Early 479-Late 480: Aśmakan machinations devastate the Vākāṭaka polity; Hariṣeṇa's empire is rent in "civil war." Original patrons give up their control, enabling the monks and artisans still living at Ajaṇṭā, as well as travelling merchants, to commission images in the caves already excavated. Eventually, the long and bloody war renders the Ajaṇṭā pass impassable. The monks leave Ajaṇṭā in search of support, for the original patrons of the caves no longer maintain their establishments and travellers no longer come near. The site is abandoned.

In general one will notice three profound moments in Spink's telling of Ajaṇṭā's history: the creation, the hiatus, and the devastation. Spink's relative chronology highlights two periods of rushed work followed by major changes in motival usages and patronage patterns, the latter followed by a sudden and absolute cessation of work. The first period of rush is explained through appeal to Aśmakan bellicosity; the second is also blamed upon Aśmaka in part, but here the dominant theme is the dissolution of an empire after a great king's death. These two events are the preeminent determining factors in Ajaṇṭā's history, and both are reconstructed based upon evidence gleaned from the incised inscriptions on Caves 16 and 17. More specifically, Spink's narrative of Aśmaka aggression stems from a single verse, number 10, in Cave 17. His characterization of the site's final years, and sudden demise, relies upon parallels between information provided in Cave 16's

verse 18 and the eighth chapter of Daṇḍin's *Daśakumāracarita*, which he treats as a crypto-historical recounting of the Vākāṭakas' downfall. In short, Spink's absolute chronology has been developed by his reading of a relative chronology into the framework of a history derived from these two verses. Let us see how they have been read, and how they might be read.

Spink has proposed a relative chronology according to which motival developments within Caves 17's, 19's, and 20's decorative programmes stop mid-way through the overall span of Vākāṭaka patronage, although none of these programmes was completed. Spink advances a history of Ajaṇṭā that accounts for these caves' premature termination by reading his relative chronological evidence in the light of Cave 17's dedicatory inscription. In short, Spink employs Mirashi's translation of one verse to substantiate a history of animosity between Cave 17's donor and the ruler of Aśmaka. Spink proposes (with supporting "horizontal" evidence) that, as this donor confronted and defeated Aśmaka some time before the site was begun, so the hiatus of 472 occurred when the Aśmakan king attacked and defeated Cave 17's donor. The only documentary evidence that could tie the Aśmakas to Cave 17's premature termination, the only direct evidence for *any* interaction between Cave 17's donor and Aśmaka, is verse 10 from Cave 17's inscription, which Mirashi has translated as follows:

9. [The donor's father] had two sons resembling Pradyumna and Sāmba. . . . The elder *of them* bore the title of king, while the second bore the appellation Ravisāmba.
10. Having subjugated prosperous countries such as Aśmaka . . . . . . [the two princes] whose prowess had become fruitful, shone like the sun and the moon.[89]

Mirashi surmises that the two royal brothers, their prowess realized, defeated the Aśmakas and others in battle. For him the Aśmaka were definitely enemies of Cave 17 donor. However, as I show in appendix B, Mirashi's reconstruction of this verse is erroneous. My new reading of this verse not only clarifies the Sanskrit, it also sheds new light on the

[89] Mirashi. *Inscriptions of the Vākāṭakas*, 128.

relationship between Cave 17's donor and the Aśmakan king. However, in this case, clarification is tantamount to problematization: the precise nature of the relationship between these two figures is far more uncertain than that suggested by Mirashi. My reconstruction of this verse may be translated:

> 10. . . . after those two [princes] vanquished [an enemy] . . . whose life was cut short . . . [in] Aśmaka and [elsewhere], they shone (or governed) brilliantly like the moon and the sun.

According to this reading, we know that Cave 17's royal donor had an enemy or enemies whom he defeated, and we may even know *where* the fight happened, but from this inscription alone we cannot determine *who* that enemy was. A foe of this cave's donor may have been defeated on several fronts, in Aśmaka and elsewhere. That foe's identity, name, and title remain unknown.

This translation and interpretation of the dedicatory inscription in Cave 17 leads me to question one of the arguments behind Spink's telling of Ajaṇṭā's history. Without Mirashi's interpretation of this verse, there is no epigraphic evidence for a conflict between Cave 17's donor and the Aśmakas. Mirashi's reading of the inscription provides Spink with an important piece of evidence for his historical reconstruction. It is true, however, that Spink also appeals to art historical evidence. His principal art historical evidence for this hypothesis is that after the Hiatus "work was renewed vigorously in the Cave 26 complex . . . but nothing more was done on the splendid Cave 17-21 complex."[90] As I noted above, this claim can be accepted as correct. Nevertheless, I would argue that without the evidence provided by Mirashi's reading of Cave 17's verse 10, it becomes difficult to validate Spink's historical reconstruction. Without Mirashi's support, Spink's observation that "the conquest of the region by the aggressive Aśmakas"[91] caused the Hiatus is no

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[90] Spink, "Archaeology of Ajaṇṭā," 78.

[91] Spink, "Archaeology of Ajaṇṭā," 78.

longer the most plausible hypothesis. Additionally, without an established pattern of enmity between the Aśmakas and Cave 17's donor one cannot quite understand the vituperous hatred which would stand behind the following observation: "now that the Aśmakas were in control [Cave 17 donor's] beautiful *caitya* hall [i.e., Cave 19] was never put into use. . . . [because] the rulers specifically disallowed all worship there, just as they never allowed any more work on . . . Caves 17 and 20."[92] Similarly, without a pattern of enmity, why would the Aśmakas have "banned the use of the standing Buddha with both arms raised, which [Cave 17's donor] had selected as the site's focal image?"[93] Spink proposes the Aśmakas controlled this iconography at the site because "the Aśmakas felt this hieratic image type was too closely identified with their old rival's power."[94] As we cannot assert that Cave 17's donor and the Aśmakas *were* old rivals, let alone new, another interpretation may be warranted. Cakravarti and Chhabra have even suggested that the powerful king of Aśmaka mentioned in Cave 26's dedicatory inscription and the donor of Cave 17 were one and the same person,[95] though I do not see how this observation could coordinate with the general lineaments of Spink's chronology.

Before proceding with my own reconstruction of Ajaṇṭā's history, however, I wish to emphasize two points that mitigate my stated doubts concerning Spink's work. First, the above critique is based upon a revised reading of Cave 17's inscription; it takes little account of the abundance and complexity of Ajaṇṭā's physical evidence. Yet, the site's art and architecture, not its inscriptions, stand at the heart of Spink's historical reconstruction. (See appendix D for a more detailed analysis of Spink's historical arguments on their own

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[92] Spink, "Archaeology of Ajaṇṭā," 78.

[93] Spink, "Archaeology of Ajaṇṭā," 79.

[94] Spink, "Archaeology of Ajaṇṭā," 79.

[95] "Notes on the Painted and Incised Inscriptions of Caves XX-XXVI," 115.

terms.) As my interpretation does not take into account the full range or ramifications of such evidence, room certainly remains for Spink's reconstruction as a competing theory. For instance, it seems that in the period after the Hiatus a passageway was cut through the cells in the Cave 19 caitya, making for an easier access to the Cave 26 complex which lay beyond:[96] my hypothesis does not explain the brutal violation of Cave 19 such a passageway represents. Nevertheless, I feel that the documentary evidence, both internal and external to Ajaṇṭā, gives a strong impetus towards reconstructing the site's history anew.

Second, insofar as the analytic distinction between relative and absolute chronologies has been suitably maintained in their elaboration, this new reconstruction of Cave 17's verse 10 has no necessary impact upon the length or elaboration of Spink's short chronology as a relative chronology. This is why, following Spink, I have emphasized the closed nature of the site as mirrored in the "crucial" Cave 16. As long as one accepts 1) that the dedicatory record was incised shortly before this cave's completion, and 2) that this cave's programmatic architectures and images can be traced to both the earliest and latest phases of the site's Vākāṭaka period, one will have to agree that Ajaṇṭā was created in the course of an eighteen, twenty, or twenty-five year span. The site's artifacts detail a history comprised of anxious periods of rush, fits, starts, and apparent catastrophes, and thus may still tell an intriguing tale, reflecting the triumphs and disasters of Hariṣeṇa's reign.

The Rocky Road to History

To recap, in the previous subsection we saw that an association of Ajaṇṭā's Vākāṭaka efflorescence with the reign of Hariṣeṇa sometime after 462 C.E. provides the only certainty for reconstructing Ajaṇṭā's history. We then found that Spink uses verse 10 from Cave 17 to document a set of stormy relations between the Vākāṭaka, Ṛṣīka, and

[96] Spink, "Archaeology of Ajaṇṭā," 79.

Aśmaka dynasties, filling out the relative, motival evidence these caves provide. But we have also found that Mirashi was mistaken in his editing of this verse, and thereby broke this linchpin of Spink's historical reconstruction. The present subsection will seek to fashion a new history for Ajaṇṭā. Although I will accept as many as possible of the remaining assumptions that underlie Spink's history, my revised reading of Cave 17's verse will result in a very different reconstruction of Ajaṇṭā's history.

Let us begin this new treatment of Ajaṇṭā's history with a closer look at the single definite linchpin of the site's history: Hariṣeṇa. What do we really know of Hariṣeṇa, in his day perhaps "the greatest ruler in the world?"[97] Direct information about this Vākāṭaka monarch comes from two sources: the paean to him and his forbearers that comprises the first half of Varāhadeva's Cave 16 inscription, and the Thāḷner grant dated to year 3 of Hariṣeṇa's reign.[98] A third document apposite to events during Hariṣeṇa's reign is the eighth chapter of the Daṇḍin's early seventh-century classic, the *Daśakumāracarita.* Following the publication of an article by V. V. Mirashi, who read this chapter as an imaginative retelling of the dissolution of the Vākāṭaka empire after the Hariṣeṇa's death, the belief that there is a consonance between Daṇḍin's art and Vākāṭaka history has become an *idée reçue* among Ajaṇṭā's chronologers. Although one cannot but be suspicious about treating an ostensibly literary work as historical, Spink accepts this thesis, and thus, given the methodological parameters of my own reconstruction, it cannot be ignored.

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[97] Walter Spink. "The Achievement of Ajanta." In *The Age of the Vākāṭakas*. Ed. by Ajay Mitra Shastri. (New Delhi: Harman Publishing House, 1992): 177.

[98] Vasudev Vishnu Mirashi. *Indological Research Papers, volume 1.* (Nagpur: Vidarbha Samshodhan Mandal, 1982): 78-87; Ajay Mitra Shastri. "Thalner Plates of Vakataka Harishena: A ReAppraisal," *Journal of the Epigraphical Society of India.* 11 (1984): 15-20; Shrimali. *Agrarian Structure*, 82-3; Shastri. "New Vākāṭaka Inscriptions," 251-253. While in India, I heard report that another Vākāṭaka copper-plate inscription had been found in Dhulia, near Thāḷner. There was further rumor that this record belonged to Hariṣeṇa himself. Unfortunately, though this rumor was known to several Vākāṭaka scholars and epigraphists, none had seen the record or could even confirm its existence.

Of these three sources, Varāhadeva's verses are the most informative. In addition to the common paeans of praise one would expect from a courtier's account of his lord, Varāhadeva recounts some of Hariṣeṇa's accomplishments as the Vākāṭaka king. In particular, verse 18 tells of Hariṣeṇa as a mighty conqueror indeed. . . perhaps. This last major Vākāṭaka ruler may have expanded his empire in every direction, to the north, east, south, and west alike (see Fig. 17 for a map of Hariṣeṇa's putative conquests). My interest in this verse is not with its reconstruction, but with the use of its translation. Accordingly, I will present Mirashi's transcription, and my own translation:

> sa kuntalāvantikaliṅgakosalatrikūṭalāṭāndhra ˘ ¯ ˘ jān imān {|}
> ˘ ¯ ˘ ¯ ¯ ˘ ˘ [śaurrya]viśrutān api svanirddeśa(guṇāti) ¯ ˘ ¯ {|| 18 ||}[99]

18. [Hariṣeṇa] . . . those . . . of Kuntala, Avanti, Kaliṅga, Kosala, Trikūṭa, Lāṭa, Andhra, [who] celebrated for heroism as well as . . . extremely . . . to the qualities of self-government.

One will immediately notice from my translation that this verse, as it now exists, lacks a verb. This problem is akin to that explored in regard to the relationship between Cave 17's donor and Aśmaka: we know that Hariṣeṇa bore some relation to the countries named Kuntala, Avanti, Kaliṅga, Kosala, Trikūṭa, Lāṭa, and Andhra, or their kings, or their populace, but that relation's content is by no means certain. Bühler and Mirashi alike read this verse as claiming that Hariṣeṇa "[conquered]" these various lands.[100] This is one likely interpretation, perhaps the most likely. Nevertheless, it is a reconstruction without any direct confirmation in the available evidence. This is why I have left the verb out of my translation: however reasonable this interpretation is, the possibility remains that this verse simply delineates the range of territories Hariṣeṇa inherited from his father, or maybe even

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[99] Mirashi. *Inscriptions of the Vākāṭakas,* 108.

[100] Burgess. *Report on Buddhist Cave Temples*, 127; Mirashi. *Inscriptions of the Vākāṭakas*, 110.

other countries with which he formed an alliance for some unknown purpose.[101] This is a point of tension that must be recognized, if not resolved. For although Bühler and Mirashi acknowledge the tentativeness of their translations, Mirashi, and following him Spink, have taken the information contained in this verse as a firm basis for reconstructing the events surrounding Ajaṇṭā's last days.

Reading this verse according to the dominant interpretation, some scholars have found in this verse mere hyperbole, broad praises for a minor monarch. Whereas it is unlikely that Hariṣeṇa took full control over these various territories, there is no evidential basis for rejecting Varāhadeva's claims out of hand (whatever they may have been).[102]

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[101] I make this latter suggestion, as it is indeterminate whether this verse's initial *sa* is a personal pronoun or the first element in the compound that follows.

[102] See Goyal (*A History of the Imperial Guptas*, 11-15) on the basis for interpreting such celebrations of territorial conquests (*digvijaya praśasti*) in royal epigraphs. However, for an example of the dangers involved in a too-uncritical acceptance of this verse as falling into the genre of *digvijaya praśasti*, we can look to a recent article in which Shobana Gokhale fills the lacuna between °*āndhra*° and °*jān* ("Epigraphical Evidence on Hariṣeṇa's Conquest from Kanheri." In *The Age of the Vākāṭakas*. Ed. by Ajay Mitra Shastri. [New Delhi: Harman Publishing House, 1992]: 269-78). Apparently viewing the martial nature of this verse as given, Gokhale boldly states that Hariṣeṇa "was the paramount ruler of the region extending from Malwa in the north to Kuntala in the south" (269). And she wonders why, as he was such a great conqueror, India's west coast is missing from his *digvijaya praśasti*. Accordingly, she proposes reconstructing the letters "parānta" into verse 18's lacuna. An ancient name for the coastal area south of the Tapti River, Aparānta (shortened to *parānta metri causa*) fits into the *Vaṃśastha* meter for the reconstructed reading: *sa kuntalāvantikaliṅga-kosalatrikūṭalāṭāndhra****parānta****jān imān*. Gokhale claims that "according to the essentials of the *Vaṃśastha* metre no other name of a country suits between Andhra and Jānimān" (277).

Gokhale's final assertion is incorrect, for *Vidarbha* scans the same metrically. Be that as it may, however, Gokhale has so completely accepted this verse as a *digvijaya praśasti* that she fails to explain what the significance of this compound's final element would be given her suggested emendation. If one accepts Gokhale's *parānta*, there are two possible readings for the line's ending °*jānimān*. First this can be analyzed into °*jān* (an accusative plural, meaning the inhabitants or people of) and *imān* (an accusative plural pronoun, "these"). In this reading, Hariṣeṇa has an unknown relationship to "these, the inhabitants of Kuntala, Avanti, Kaliṅga Kosala, Trikūṭa, Lāṭa, Andhra, and Aparānta." And though it would make grammatical sense to read this relationship as one between conqueror and conquered populace, culturally this interpretation seems unlikely. Within the Cave 16 inscription, Hariṣeṇa's ancestors are celebrated for vanquishing their enemies, for having their lotus-like feet kissed by rays from the jewels set in the crowns of other kings, for conquering all armies, and for humbling the lord of Kuntala, among other accomplishments. These other Vākāṭaka kings' glory little derived from their ability to subdue farmers and merchants. I would be surprised if Cave 16's poet celebrated Hariṣeṇa with lesser praise than his forefathers, or described the mere populace of the many realms mentioned as "celebrated for [heroism]" and interested in "self-government."

By reading °*jānimān* as this longer compound's final element (as Gokhale seems to do), one complicates matters still further: °*jānimān* is a nominative singular -- apposite to the subject of

Indeed, a copper-plate grant issued by Hariṣeṇa in the 3rd year of his reign suggests that he commenced these conquests early in his royal career. Found near Thāḷner, a town in what was once Traikūṭaka land commanding the north/south road over the Narmadā river to Avanti (another Hariṣeṇa conquest according to Cave 16), this copper-plate records Hariṣeṇa's grant of lands to Brāhmaṇas in that locale. In fact, reviewing the map I have provided (Fig. 7), which shows the relative positions of this record's findspot, of the Vākāṭaka excavations at Ajaṇṭā, Ghaṭotkaca, and Banaoti, and of the Vākāṭaka capital at Vatsagulma, it becomes clear that this east/west road would have been vitally important to the Vatsagulma Vākāṭakas, for it gave them direct access to the Tāpī river, the sea, and foreign trade. Hariṣeṇa may well have been one of the greatest kings of his day; he may have raised the Vākāṭaka family to the apogee of its power, established a domain from sea to sea, and fostered what, according to Spink's memorable hyperbole, "may well be mankind's most remarkable creative achievement."[103]

Having reached such heights, Hariṣeṇa's empire seems to have fallen hard: there is contestable evidence regarding whether he had a son and successor, but the Ajaṇṭā caves themselves unambiguously bespeak a cataclysm of some sort, resulting in their rapid and full abandonment. As Spink's history cast the Aśmakas in the role of malefactors, first defeated by Cave 17's donor, and later liable for the period of hiatus, so Spink views that land's king as responsible for Ajaṇṭā's ultimate demise. Spink's reconstruction of the events related to the development of Ajaṇṭā's caves is in large part a reworking of ideas presented

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the sentence, presumably Hariṣeṇa -- meaning possessed of (*mān*) wives (*jāni*) from these various lands. This latter reading leaves no scope for a claim, based upon this verse, that Hariṣeṇa conquered these lands. To have possessed such a glorious range of matrimonial alliances may well merit eternal celebration. However, it all but invalidates the possibility of reading this verse as possessing historical information parallel to that in the *Daśakumāracarita*.

If one does not reconstruct this lacuna with the name of yet another country, but instead a word meaning king that ends in °*ja* (not *rāja*, as this violates the meter), one retains the possibility of reading this verse within the *digvijaya praśasti* genre. This seems to me a reasonable tactic, albeit a reconstruction of this sort stands outside the scope of my study.

[103] Spink. "Reply to K. Khandalawala, A. Jamkhedkar, B. Deshpande," 17.

by Mirashi, who in a 1945 article set out to prove that the eighth chapter of Daṇḍin's *Daśakumāracarita* retells the events surrounding the Vākāṭaka empire's fall. This chapter of the *Daśakumāracarita* concerns the demise of a King-of-king whose many feudatories turn on him due to Aśmaka perfidy.

Mirashi's argument was based upon his observation that the list of treacherous feudatories enumerated in the *Daśakumāracarita* was virtually identical to a list of territories found in verse 18 of the Cave 16 inscription. Conquered by Hariṣeṇa early in his reign (according to Mirashi's interpretation of Varāhadeva's verse), these lands were would have had a natural impulse to regain their individual sovereignty when the opportunity arose. In short, the *Daśakumāracarita's* eighth chapter is likened to a docudrama telling the history of the Vākāṭaka empire after Hariṣeṇa's death. As Spink tells it, "Daṇḍin has changed the names of the players, but the 'playing-field' is the same, for nearly every territory mentioned in the Cave 16 inscription figures in Daṇḍin's account too, as do the domains that had been in Hariṣeṇa's empire from the time of his succession."[104] Here I will present an excellent summary published by B. Deshpande, inserting the equivalences to historical figures made by Spink and Mirashi:

> The pious and benevolent king Punyavarma (≈Hariṣeṇa), who ruled over Vidarbha region was succeeded by his son Anantavarma (≈Sarvasena III, Hariṣeṇa's son), who was given to sensual pleasures and neglected his royal duties. His faithful and old minister, Vasurakshita (≈Varāhadeva), advised him to mend ways and study statecraft but Anantavarma was under the vicious influence of Viharabhadra, his companion in sensuous affairs. He turned a deaf ear to the advice of Vasurakshita and even insulted him.
>
> Now Anantavarma became utterly careless about his empire and spent most of his time in pursuit of sensual pleasures. Vasantabhanu, the king of neighboring Aśmaka country, was clever enough to take advantage of this situation. A son of his minister Chandrapalita entered Vidarbha under false pretext that as a punishment for a quarrel with his father he had been banished. Anantavarma, the generous Vidarbha king, gladly granted him asylum.
>
> Chandrapalita was a wily politician. Along with him came bards, dancers, singers, musicians, hunters, and a host of domestic servants, who

[104] Spink. "The Achievement of Ajanta," 183.

> were spies in disguise. They kept the king busy with hunting, gambling, drinking bouts and sex orgies. The administration collapsed and chaos took over.
>
> Now Vasantabhanu instigated Bhanuvarma, the ruler of Vanavasi region to invade Vidarbha, which he did and conquered some bordering districts of the Vidarbha empire. Anantavarma, now realizing his folly, tried to tide over the coming danger. He hastily gathered the remnants of his army and called his feudatories for help. Some feudatories responded to his entreaties and came to his succor. Vasantabhanu, the master-plotter, was first to come. A sanguinary battle was fought on the banks of Varada river,[105] Vasantabhanu very skillfully sowed the seeds of dissension among the feudatories of the Vidarbha king and turned his faithful allies like Virasena, the lord of Murala; Ekavira, the lord of Rsika; Kumaragupta, the lord of Konkana and Nagapala the lord of Nasikya against him. They betrayed their master and went over the [*sic*] Bhanuvarma. Anantavarma fell while fighting. Vasantabhanu grabbed the Vidarbha empire and the spoils of war were shared by the unfaithful feudatories.[106]

Clearly, if one intends to treat this tale as an historical reflex, one must identify the evil Vasantabhanu, or at least the land under his personal dominion. Because Aśmaka is not named among the acquisitions Hariṣeṇa made during his campaign, Mirashi and Spink have assumed that it, along with Ṛṣīka and Murala, were feudatory states already under Devasena's suzerainty at the time of Hariṣeṇa's accession.

The first point of clarification is that two lands called *Aśmaka* (also called by the Prākrit Asaka, Assaka, and Aśvaka) are found in Indian literature and epigraphs. One, mentioned in the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*, the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, and Kumāralāta's *Kalpanāmaṇḍitikā,* is located in India's north-west; Kern has identified this land with the Assakenoi mentioned by Greek geographers.[107]

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[105] Kale's edition of the text (Daṇḍin. *The Daśakumāracarita of Daṇḍin*. Ed. and trans. by M. R. Kale. [Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986]) represents the battle as having taken place on the bank of the Narmadā river. However, Mirashi located several manuscripts which use *Varadā* in place of Kale's *Narmadā* ("Historical Data in Daṇḍin's Daśakumāracarita," *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*. 26 [1945]: 21 n. 1). As the Varadā river crosses through Vidarbha and thus makes more sense in context, I have followed Mirashi and accepted this variant.

[106] Brahmanand Deshpande. "Dating of Ajintha Caves in the context of Vakataka Decline," *Pathik*. 3.4 (1992): 9-10.

[107] Ajay Mitra Shastri. *India as Seen in the Bṛhatsaṃhitā of Varāhamihira*. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1969): 69-70.

The precise locale of the southern Aśmaka is not definitively set. An early mention of this region is found in the *Pārāyaṇavagga* of the Pāli *Sutta Nipāta*, wherein a Brāhmaṇa is described as dwelling in the vicinity of Aḷaka, in the region of Assaka, on the banks of the Godāvarī river.[108] Later in the same text, several ascetics from this Brāhmaṇa's homeland become inspired to travel north to meet Buddha. The description of their itinerary begins: "firstly to Paiṭṭhāna of Aḷaka, then to Māhisatti."[109] This Paiṭṭhāna is the Sanskrit Pratiṣṭhāna, a city along the Godāvarī now called Paithan, just to the south of modern Aurangabad.

Mirashi (and Spink) takes this identification as the basis for where he would locate Aśmaka: Mirashi acknowledges Paithan as the capital of Aḷaka,[110] and places Aśmaka to its south-west "between the Sātmālā range and the Godāvarī river"[111] (see Fig. 18). Among historians of India, Mirashi stands virtually alone in this opinion. For, just as the Pāli literature has preserved the name of Aḷaka's capital city, so too does it, along with the *Mahābhārata* and *Vāyu Purāṇa*, record the capital of Aśmaka, which is found variously named Potali, Potana, Podana, Pāḍana. Raychaudhuri has identified this city with the modern town of Bodhan, located along the Godāvarī river in the north of present day Andhra Pradesh.[112]

Raychaudhuri's identification is reasonable as the *Pārāyaṇavagga* places Aśmaka contiguous to Mūḷaka, and the *Cullakāliṅga Jātaka* claims that it borders Kaliṅga (the

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[108] *so assakassa visaye aḷakassa samāsane | vasi godhāvarīkūle uñchena ca phalena ca ||* Bhikku J. Kashyap (ed). *The Khuddhakapāṭha-Dhammapada-Udāna-Itivuttaka-Suttanipāta [Khuddhakanikāya vol. 1]*. (Nālanda: Pāli Publication Board, 1959): 419.

[109] *aḷakassa patiṭṭhānaṃ puri māhissatiṃ tadā* Kashyap. *Khuddhakapāṭha,* 422.

[110] Also called Mūḷaka, cf. Sircar. *Studies in the Geography,* 272.

[111] Mirashi. "Historical Data in Daṇḍin's Daśakumāracarita," 26.

[112] Hemchandra Raychaudhuri. *Political History of Ancient India.* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1953): 143-44; Sircar. *Studies in the Geography,* 189.

eastern coast between the Mahānadī and Godāvarī rivers, Fig. 17).[113] Furthermore, within epigraphic records, Aśmaka has been paired with Vidarbha,[114] with Ṛṣīka,[115] and again in the *Jātaka* collection, with Avanti.[116] Mirashi overlooks most of the available data, when he situates Aśmaka so far to the west. Instead, as one finds in Schwartzberg's invaluable *Historical Atlas of South Asia*, this region may be placed generally to the south of Vidarbha, to the south-east of Mūḷaka, to the north-east of Ṛṣīka, to the west of Kaliṅga, and to the north-east of Kuntala and other lands.[117] Let me emphasize, Aśmaka is a territorial, not a political, designation, and the *Daśakumāracarita's* presentation of Vidarbha's scheming nemesis as simply *Aśmakendra*, Lord of Aśmaka,[118] leaves out this ne'er-do-well's dynastic or tribal appellation.

In this sub-section, I am attempting to reconstruct a history for Ajaṇṭā which, like that of Spink, assumes Cave 16's verse 18 is a *digvijaya praśasti* and that the *Daśakumāra-carita* has a crypto-historical dimension, but which diverges from that of Spink in that it finds no documentary evidence for positing the Lord of Aśmaka as inimical to the

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[113] Edward Byles Cowell (ed). *The Jātaka or Stories of the Buddha's Former Births*. (Delhi: Low Price Publications, 1990): #301, vol. 3, 1-5.

[114] Vasudev Vishnu Mirashi. "The Rāṣṭrakūṭas of Mānapura," *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*. 25 (1944): 36-50; Vasudev Vishnu Mirashi. "Pandrangapalli Grant of Rashtrakuta Avidheya," *Epigraphia Indica*. 37 (1967): 9-24.

[115] This is equivalent to the country of '*Asika*' named in Burgess. *Report on the Buddhist Cave Temples,* 108.

[116] Cowell. *Jātaka*, #532, vol. 5, 168. In this last instance, there is no implication that Assaka and Avanti share a border. This verse mentions four lands a king of Benares would fain conquer: Aṅga, Magadha, Avanti, and Assaka. Here, Avanti seems to be metonymic for the Vindhyan region in general, and Assaka for the south. Similarly, Bhaṭṭasvāmin's (date unknown) commentary on Kauṭilīya's *Dharmaśāstra* identifies Aśmaka with the entirety of Mahārāṣṭra (Sircar. *Studies in the Geography*, 190). Apparently, at its greatest extent, Aśmaka was held to be comprise Deccan plateau south of the Narmadā river.

[117] Joseph E. Schwartzberg (ed). *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992): 21.

[118] Daṇḍin. *Daśakumāracarita,* 200.

Vākāṭaka regime. Knowing the identity of Aśmaka and its ruler are key to recovering Ajaṇṭā's history. But because Varāhadeva does not mention Aśmaka, because the Cave 17 reference is unclear, and because the *Daśakumāracarita* lacks sufficient detail, the identity of this central figure will have to be recovered through an investigation of the archaeological evidence.

We have seen that the modern town of Bodhan was once considered the Aśmakan capital. Unfortunately, Bodhan is now better known for its massive sugar refineries than its history. The city has received no systematic archaeological investigation; any claims made here must be tentative. Sometime after the Pāli literature's composition, probably upon the breakup of the Śātavāhana empire in third century, the city once known as Podana fell to ruin. It is next heard of in the tenth century, under the name *Podana-Nāḍu*, when the Rāṣṭrakūṭa king Indra III constructed a Vishnu temple named Indranārāyaṇa there, and raised the city to a provincial capital;[119] in the Kalyana Cālukya period (11th century) it came to be known as *Bahudhānyanagara* and was the site of some Viṣṇu worship.[120]

Whoever the great and mighty King of Aśmaka mentioned in Cave 26's verse 9 might have been, Bodhan was likely not the center of his government. Of course, lack of evidence must not be taken as positive proof. But even if no data exists to confirm Bodhan itself as an important site in Vākāṭaka India, we have definite evidence that land in its vicinity was actively held and occupied by the Vatsagulma Vākāṭakas. According to the sparse historical data concerning Vatsagulma land-holdings, the area described as central Aśmaka had been associated with the Vākāṭakas well before Hariṣeṇa's rise to power. In addition to Hariṣeṇa's Thāḷner copper-plate, only three land-grant records have been

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[119] M. V. Rajagopali. *Andhra Pradesh District Gazetteers, Nizambad.* (Hyderabad: Government of Andhra Pradesh, 1973): 16; S. J. Mangalam. *Historical Geography and Toponymy of Andhra Pradesh.* (New Delhi: Sundeep Prakashan, 1986): 73, 216.

[120] Rajagopali. *Andhra Pradesh Gazetteers,* 17; Mangalam. *Historical Geography,* 73, 158.

recovered from this branch of the Vākāṭaka family. One, Devasena's Indian Office Plate,[121] is incomplete, but seems to have granted land to the north of Vatsagulma. That of Vindhyaśakti II, Hariṣeṇa's great-great grandfather, names one of that king's district headquarters as Nāndīkaḍa,[122] which is identified with the modern Nandeḍ, about seventy-five miles south of Vatsagulma, and 50 miles north-west of Bodhan. The last, the Bidar plate of Devasena, issued in the fifth year of his reign,[123] allows us to push the known limit of Vatsagulma Vākāṭaka territory even further south, for one must travel from Vatsagulma past Nandeḍ another ninety miles before reaching Bidar. Most importantly, as the maps show, en route between Nandeḍ and Bidar is Bodhan, the supposed capital of Aśmaka.[124] In short, by the early days of Devasena's reign, and possibly from long before, the only known capital of Aśmaka was situated well within the Vatsagulma Vākāṭaka heartland. And there is no evidence that during the Vākāṭaka period Bodhan would have been more than a provincial town.[125]

Evidence from the Śātavāhana period and before names Aśmaka as a major, if not *the* major, territorial division of south India; its greatest extent is reached in Bhaṭṭasvāmin's commentary to Kauṭilīya's *Arthaśāstra*, wherein Aśmaka is equated with Mahārāṣṭra in its entirety.[126] In fact, not only is the city of Vatsagulma situated within the area demarcated as Aśmaka, but this branch of the family's heartland seems to be coextensive with the

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[121] Mirashi. *Inscriptions of the Vākāṭakas,* 101-2, plate 24.

[122] Mirashi. *Inscriptions of the Vākāṭakas,* 93-100, plate 23.

[123] Sastry. "Hyderabad Plates of Vakataka Devasena, Year 5."

[124] Bodhan is approximately 57 miles north-north-east of modern Bidar.

[125] A parallel example can be found in the case of Vidarbha. The ancient capital of this territory is said to have been Kuṇḍīna, identified as the modern town of Kauṇḍinyapura, along the Wardha (Varadā) river (Sircar. *Studies in the Geography*, 183). Nevertheless, this locale had no known import in Vākāṭaka days.

[126] Sircar. *Studies in the Geography*, 190.

territory almost universally attributed to Aśmaka. It seems likely, therefore, that the Aśmaka in which Cave 17's donor fought his enemies[127] was actually part of Hariṣeṇa's personal lands. *It is, in fact, possible that the great and powerful Aśmaka king to whom Cave 26's inscription refers is Hariṣeṇa himself.* The Aśmakas referred to in the Cave 17 and 26 inscriptions may be the Vatsagulma Vākāṭakas themselves. This line of thinking (albeit without reference to Ajaṇṭā) has already been proposed by D.C. Sircar.[128] Clearly, the political context of Ajaṇṭā requires further consideration.

Reconstructions and Resurrections

To write a new history for the site requires us to first turn to the Nandivardhana-

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[127] Remember, this is only one possible interpretation of Cave 17's verse, albeit the one accepted for the purposes of my historical reconstruction.

[128] Sircar. *Studies in the Geography*, 188-190. Mirashi ("Pandrangapalli Grant," 14) disputes the equating of the Aśmakas with the Vatsagulma Vākāṭakas by appeal to Rājaśekhara's *Kāvyamīmāṃsā* (10th C.E.), wherein that author writes:"within the Vidarbha [lands] is a city named Vatsagulma (*vidarbheṣu vatsagulmaṃ nāma nagaram* |)." Surely one cannot miss the proximity of Vatsagulma to Vidarbha; the fact that at some times the city was included within that greater territory comes as no surprise. But another literary source, far closer in date to the period under consideration, the *Kāmasūtra*, represents Vatsagulma and Vidarbha as two kingdoms, each with its own distinct sexual cultures: verses 5.5.32 and 5.5.33 distinguish between the *Vātsagulmaka* and the *Vaidarbha*, the lords of Vatsagulma and the lords of Vidarbha. Moreover, in the *Jayamaṅgalā* commentary to this verse, Vatsagulma is simply said to be "in the south (*dakṣiṇapathe*)". Other territorial divisions discussed in this section of the *Kāmasūtra* include Andhra, Aparānta, and Surāṣṭra. Vatsagulma and Vidarbha are again distinguished in verses 5.6.31 and 5.6.32. Of course, this does not prove the Vatsagulmas were the Aśmakas, but it does show that in Vākāṭaka times outsiders knew Vatsagulma to be distinct from Vidarbha.

This matter is further clarified by a contemporary source that *does* suggest the equation of Aśmaka with the Vatsagulma Vākāṭakas: a copper-plate grant found at Pāṇḍaraṅgapallī in the Sātārā district of modern Mahārāṣṭra (for the general locale see *Mānapura* on the maps). This grant characterizes a Rāṣṭrakūṭa ruler named Mānāṅka as having terrified the countries of Vidarbha and Aśmaka, and as the ruler of Kuntala (*santrastavidarbhāśmakamaṇḍalaḥ* and *śrīmān[ku]ntalānāṃ pra[śā]stā* (Mirashi. "Pandrangapalli Grant," 20). This record is significant if only because it seems to present Vidarbha and Aśmaka as contiguous lands of equal stature, just as the *Kāmasūtra* suggests for Vatsagulma and Vidarbha. We have no means to date this inscription, save paleography. Based upon that chronometer, Mirashi places Mānāṅka in the second-half of fourth century, making Mānāṅka Vātsyāyana's near contemporary ("Pandrangapalli Grant," 16). Further, Varāhadeva's Cave 16 inscription tells that Hariṣeṇa's great-great grandfather, Vindhyaśakti II, fought the lord of Kuntala at almost precisely this time. It would seem that given the fact that Vindhyaśakti II held land that was traditionally typically located in Aśmaka (as shown by his Bāsim plate) and the fact that the *Kāmasūtra* clearly separates Vatsagulma from Vidarbha in this same general time-frame, the terrified *Aśmakamaṇḍala* of the Pāṇḍaraṅgapallī grant can potentially be identified as the land ruled by the Vatsagulma Vākāṭakas.

Pravarapura Vākāṭakas. Narendrasena, the penultimate monarch of that branch, left no evidence of his rule. But three copper-plate grants made by his son, Pṛthivīṣeṇa II, claim that under Narendrasena "his family's Royalty was stolen away by a kinsman who had been previously schooled in the *guṇas*, [the six political expedients]."[129] That kinsman was likely Hariṣeṇa or his father Devasena. Looking at the map (Fig. 17), one will see that if Varāhadeva is to be believed about Hariṣeṇa's exploits, he would have had to have captured Narendrasena's Vidarbha before seizing Kosala.

Land grants from both branches of the Vākāṭakas lend further support to this reconstructed history. Almost invariably, these records start with an account of the donor's royal lineage, typically beginning with Pravarasena I, the Samrāṭ, and greatest Vākāṭaka monarch. But Devasena's Bidar plate, Hariṣeṇa's Thāḷner plate, and Varāhadeva's Cave 16 epigraph all commence with the name of Vindhyaśakti, whom they call the original righteous King of the Vākāṭakas (*vākāṭakānam ādidharmamahārāja*). This could be viewed as an attempt to legitimate the reuniting of Vidarbha and Vatsagulma/Aśmaka, through appeal to the time when the Vākāṭaka empire was single and whole.

A second measure of circumstantial evidence for the subordination of the

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[129] *pūrvādhigataguṇavad-dāyādāpahṛta-vaṃśaśrī* Mirashi. *Inscriptions of the Vākāṭakas,* 81, l. 26-7; V. B. Kolte. "Māhūrzarī Plates of Pṛthiviṣeṇa II," *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*. (1972): line 21-2; Shastri. "Māṇḍhal Plates of Pṛthivisheṇa II," 177, line 17. I have standardized the Sanskrit. See Shastri ("Māṇḍhal Plates," 173, n.1) for a discussion of the various possible parsings of this compound. I have deviated from his interpretation, in that Shastri reads *pūrvvādhigata*, "previously acquired," with *vaṃśaśrī*, "family fortune," whereas I read it with the contiguous *guṇavad*. Shastri was forced into this reading because he saw *guṇavad* as meaning either virtuous (which would be an odd thing to say of someone who deposed your father) or as equivalent to *gauṇa*, meaning minor or secondary. He preferred the latter. However, the circumlocution of using *guṇavad* for *gauṇa* makes little sense, since this text is not versified. Instead, *guṇa* can also signify the six expedients a king uses in conducting foreign policy: "alliance, war, marching, halting, dividing the army, and seeking protection" royal policy" (Manu. *The Laws of Manu*. Trans. by Georg Bühler. [New York: Dover, 1969]: 241). These six are presented in the Laws of Manu 7.160-215, and are explicated at great length in Kauṭilīya's *Arthaśāstra*, which devotes the entire seventh book to them (*The Kauṭilīya Arthaśāstra*. Ed. by R. P. Kangle. [Bombay: University of Bombay, 1969]); see also P. V. Kane (*History of Dharmaśāstra (Ancient and Mediaeval Religious and Civil Law in India)*. [Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1968]: vol. 3, 223f.) for an elaboration of other sources on the subject. In the present context, this interpretation of *guṇa* is not only possible, but reasonable.

Nandivardhana-Pravarapura branch is found in the genealogies contained in Pṛthivīṣeṇa's copper-plates. Assuming that Devasena (or Hariṣeṇa) took Vidarbha, it would still not be unusual for the conqueror to set the conquered king back upon his throne as a feudatory. Indeed, this pattern of kingship must be assumed no matter who the conqueror was, for Narendrasena's son, Pṛthivīṣeṇa II, issued four known land grants, the first dated in year 2 of his reign, the last comes from an unknown date after year 17. These grants are valuable documents for they change over time, perhaps reflecting events during Pṛthivīṣeṇa's reign. His first grant simply names his father as Narendrasena, *without giving him any royal title*, but Pṛthivīṣeṇa calls himself Narendrasena's good son and a Vākāṭaka king.[130] Later grants, dated to the 10th and 17th years of his reign, elaborate the story, calling Narendrasena *mahārāja* and recounting that Narendrasena was honored by the rulers of Kosalā, Mekhalā, and Mālava before he lost the family business. These records also magnify Pṛthivīṣeṇa's own deeds, calling him one who has resurrected his fallen family.[131] Pṛthivīṣeṇa must have had further hardships, for his final grant, undated, says that he was one who raised up his twice-fallen family.[132]

Based upon Pṛthivīṣeṇa II's inscriptions, a history of the relations between the two Vākāṭaka branches may be reconstructed in outline thus. Narendrasena was the liege lord of several other kings early in his royal career, but later lost his domain to Devasena or Hariṣeṇa. Narendrasena was either killed or placed back on his throne in a subordinate position, such that when Pṛthivīṣeṇa II took his place as king, Narendrasena was treated as a family disgrace. Subsequently, Pṛthivīṣeṇa regained his kingdom, presumably by attacking his cousin Hariṣeṇa. Finally, Pṛthivīṣeṇa lost and regained his realm a second

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[130] Shastri. "Māṇḍhal Plates," 166, line 15.

[131] *magnavaṃśoddhartṛ.* Kolte. "Māhūrzarī Plates, 193, line 26; Shastri. "Māṇḍhal Plates," 177, line 21.

[132] *dvimagnavaṃśoddhartṛ.* Mirashi. *Inscriptions of the Vākāṭakas,* 81, line 33.

time, only to lose it a third and final time.

With this hypothetical history in mind, the *Daśakumāracarita*, as a crypto-historical text, may profitably be seen as telling of *Narendrasena's* fall. The virtuous Puṇyavarman becomes identified with Pravarasena II, a renowned king under whose reign this branch of the Vākāṭaka family reached its pinnacle. Puṇyavarman's weak-willed son, Anantavarman, will be equated with Narendrasena. Anantavarman's son, Pṛthivīṣeṇa, whose fictionalized history I did not relate above, would be the *Daśakumāracarita's* Bhāskaravarman. The evil Aśmakas will be Hariṣeṇa's own family. In fact, the scheming Candrapālita could be equated with Hastibhoja, Varāhadeva's father and Devasena's prized minister. The Aśmaka plant, Indrapālita, who corrupted Anantavarman, could be Cave 16's Varāhadeva himself.

This cast of characters actually offers a close fit to three other details presented in the literary account. According to Daṇḍin, after the Aśmaka king wreaked havoc in Vidarbha through stealth, he incited a *vānavāsya* to attack Anantavarman.[133] This *vānavāsya* is said to have met Anantavarman and his fickle feudatories on the bank of the Varadā River. Finally, the text claims that the Aśmaka king gave the *vānavāsya* a small portion of the booty as a gift.[134] These three facts are significant, for they suggest facts known about the Nalas of Puṣkarī (see Fig. 17 or 18), a distinct historical enemy of the Nandivardhana Vākāṭakas.

To recover the identity of the *vānavāsya*, B. Deshpande has drawn attention to the literal significance of this epithet. As a secondary derivative of the word *vanavāsin*, forest-dweller, it could be used to describe the ruler of a forested region.[135] A secondary

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[133] Daṇḍin. *Daśakumāracarita,* 200.

[134] Daṇḍin. *Daśakumāracarita,* 360.

[135] Deshpande. "Dating of Ajintha Caves in the context of Vakataka Decline."

derivative of this sort does not carry with it the same forceful connotation of kingship as the use of a royal epithet, albeit the two are semantically identical. In the *Daśakumāra-carita*, secondary derivatives are not used to glorify any of Vidarbha's feudatories. Instead, those monarchs merit kingly epithets suffixed to the names of their respective lands: Vasantabhanu is called Aśmaka-*indra*; Avantideva is Kuntala-*pati*; Vīrasena is Murala-*iśa*; Ekavīra is Ṛṣīka-*iśa*; Kumāragupta is Koṅkaṇa-*pati*; and Nāgapāla is Nāsikya-*nātha*.[136] Indeed, the term *vānavāsya* is found four times in the text, and no more grand royal title is ever used for this foe of Anantavarman. Deshpande, in turn, suggests that the forest dwelling spoilers of the Vākāṭaka kingdom should be equated with a family known as Nala, which came from the city of Puṣkarī, located in a heavily forested region.

Supporting this grammatical and topographical data, the geographical data also points to a viable identification of the Nalas of Puṣkarī with the *Daśakumāracarita's vānavāsya*. If one accepts the *Daśakumāracarita* as a history, the conflict between the Vākāṭakas and *vānavāsya* would have occurred along the banks of the Varadā river, at the south-eastern limit of ancient Vidarbha (Fig. 18). According to this scenario, the Nalas would not have had to pass through any foreign lands to raid Vidarbha from Puṣkarī. By contrast, Mirashi posits that this *vānavāsya* was a member of the Kadamba family, whose capital, named *Vanavāsī*, was located far to the south-west of the Vākāṭaka heartland. It

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[136] Daṇḍin. *Daśakumāracarita,* 200.

seems fantastic that an invading army could pass through Kuntala,[137] Ṛṣīka,[138] Aśmaka, and half of Vidarbha without challenge (see Fig.17). Because of the number of territories intervening between the Kadamba capital city and the Varadā river, Mirashi's identification of the *vānavāsya* with the Kadambas may be safely abandoned.

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[137] The location of this territory was one of many points of contention between V. V. Mirashi and D. C. Sircar. Mirashi placed this land in "the Southern Maratha Country" ("The Rāṣṭrakūṭas of Mānapura," 41); Sircar placed Kuntala further to the south, but acknowledged that at times it extended as far north as the Southern Maratha County (*Studies in the Geography,* 188, 190). In other words, like many ancient Indian territories, Kuntala could be just about wherever an author chose to place it. In the inscriptions of the later Kadambas, Kuntala is the area around Vanavāsī (*Studies in the Geography,* 14); in the days of the Later Cālukyas it is in the Kṛṣṇāvarṇā basin (Mirashi. "Pandrangapalli Grant," 14); in the *Udayasundarīkathā*, Kuntala's capital is Pratiṣṭhāna on the Godāvarī River: the same city the *Suttanipāta* named as the capital of Mūḷaka, in Aśmaka. I have no desire to resolve this matter, and instead have chosen to follow Schwartzberg's *Historical Atlas* as the authority.

[138] The location of Ṛṣīka is of some interest, for Spink, following Mirashi, has named the donor of Cave 17 as the King of Ṛṣīka, and has identified Ṛṣīka as the territory in which Ajaṇta was located. Mirashi advances little tangible material for his placement of Ajaṇṭā in the country of Ṛṣīka (*Inscriptions of the Vākāṭakas,* 123-4). The evidence Mirashi cites is as follows: Varāhamihira places Ṛṣīka in the south; the *Rāmāyana* and *Mahābhārata* alike couple Ṛṣīka with Vidarbha; the *Mahābhārata* also associates Ṛṣīka with Aśmaka; the *Daśakumāracarita* names both Ṛṣīka and Aśmaka, along with Mūḷaka, as feudatories of Vidarbha; and the Nāsik cave inscription of Puḷumāvi also mentions Asika (=Sanskrit Ṛṣīka), Asaka (=Sanskrit Aśmaka) and Mūḷaka together. Mirashi reasons further, that based upon the *Sutta Nipāta's* "Pārāyaṇavagga," Mūḷaka can be unambiguously placed as the region directly south of present-day Aurangabad, with the ancient Pratiṣṭhāna (modern Paithan) as its capital; Vidarbha is generally agreed upon as the area now known as Berar, situated between the Varadā and Wainganga rivers. Thus, Mirashi claims that the Ajaṇṭā region must be ancient Ṛṣīka (now known locally as Khāndesh), for it is the only area abutting Vidarbha (on the east) and Mūḷaka (on the south).

However, these borders are very general, and there is specific evidence to place Ṛṣīka elsewhere. As I have just noted, there are a number of literary sources that place Ṛṣīka somewhere in the south. Mirashi only situates it more precisely by positioning it relative to Vidarbha, Mūḷaka, and Aśmaka. However, the Hāthigumphā inscription of Khāravela, a king of Kaliṅga circa 1st century B.C.E., locates Asikanagara (the capital of Ṛṣīka) on the bank of the Kanhabeṃṇa river (D. C. Sircar (ed). *Select Inscriptions Bearing on Indian History and Civilization.* [Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1965]: vol. 1, 215, line 4). This compound has interpreted as referring to a confluence of two rivers. Which two is matter of contention, but none of the solutions come anywhere close to Ajaṇṭā. Sircar claims that the Kṛṣṇā river is "often mentioned as Kṛṣṇaveṇā or Kṛṣṇaveṇī" (*Studies in the Geography,* 59), thereby placing Ṛṣīka's capital far to the south (not Mirashi's north) of Mūḷaka. And, whatever other evidence there may be for this name, confirmation for Sircar's interpretation is found in an early sixth century inscription which uses Kṛṣṇabeṇṇa for the Kṛṣṇā (F. Kielhorn. "Chikkulla Plates of Vikramendravarman II," *Epigraphia Indica.* 4 [1896-97]: 196, line 19-20); this location of Ṛṣīka on the Kṛṣṇā's bank is also suggested by the Puḷumavi inscription, which seems to read from south to north Ṛṣīka, Aśmaka, Mūlaka (Amarendra Nath. "Toponymy of Asaka and Asika," *Indica.* 27 [1990]: 89). An alternate view is offered by A. Nath, who claims that the *Kanha°* of Kanhabeṃṇa is the modern Kanhan river which flows just east of Nāgpur; the *°beṃṇa* is the Wainganga. This would place the Ṛṣīkanagara well within central Vidarbha, and far from Ajaṇṭā. I do not intend to referee between Sircar and Nath. My only purpose for elaborating this point is to indicate the difficulty of calling the Ajaṇṭā's locale ancient Ṛṣīka, or the donor of Cave 17, the King of Ṛṣīka.

A third piece of supporting evidence comes from the inscriptions of the Nala kings themselves. The *Purāṇas* know of a Nala dynasty ruling in the heavily forested Bastar region.[139] These Nalas may have had as many as nine rulers, but we are interested in only three, the first of whom is known as Bhavadattavarman, who was followed by two sons, Arthapati and Skandhavarman. We know of Bhavadattavarman through a copper-plate grant issued on his behalf by his son Bhaṭṭāraka Arthapati.[140] The bequest is said to have been made on the occasion of Bhavadattavarman's pilgrimage to the holy Gaṅgā in Prayāga (Allahabad), to bless his marriage. Issued from Nandivardhana, once a Vākāṭaka capital, this grant was found in Ṛddhapur, a town along the Varadā river. If one intends to follow the *Daśakumāracarita*, one can explain the Nala's presence in Nandivardhana through reference to this detail: Daṇḍin's Vasantabhanu gave the *vānavāsya* a portion of the wealth taken from Anantavarman. Called *kośāvāhana*, this booty seems to have been treasure and livestock. It is doubtful that the *vānavāsya* received territory. Nevertheless, the newly victorious Devasena or Hariṣeṇa could well have had the magnanimity to allow his son to make a grant in his father's honor.

Even if the Nalas did claim a portion of Narendrasena's former kingdom, their dominion in Vidarbha did not last long. Arthapati issued a land-grant in his seventh regnal year from Puṣkarī, the Nala's ancestral home.[141] Nor was any alliance between the Vatsagulma Vākāṭakas and the Nalas lasting. Hariṣeṇa is thought to have conquered Kosala and Andhra both, a swath which would have encroached upon Nala territory. Indeed, Arthapati's brother, Bhavadattavarman's younger son, Skandhavarman claims in his only known record, issued in the twelfth year of his reign, that he "reclaimed the lost royal

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[139] Pargiter. *The Purāṇa Text,* 51, 73.

[140] Y. R. Gupte. "Rithapur Plates of Bhavattavarman," *Epigraphia Indica.* 19 (1927-28): 100-104.

[141] D. C. Sircar. "Kesaribeda Plates of Nala Arthapati-Bhattaraka," *Epigraphia Indica.* 28 (1949-50): 16, line 1.

prosperity which had fallen into other hands and repeopled the deserted Puṣkarī."[142]

Thus far in reconstructing the history of the relation between the two branches of the Vākāṭaka family, I have suggested that Narendrasena was defeated by his cousin Devasena. Further, because the *Daśakumāracarita's* historicity is an *idée reçue* for Ajaṇṭā's chronologers, I have shown how the events described in Daṇḍin's work can still be regarded as historical, where Narendrasena is Daṇḍin's Ruler of Vidarbha and Hariṣeṇa or Devasena is the nefarious King of Aśmaka. Although I do not want to belabor this matter any further, this interpretation fits the available facts with much greater fidelity than that of Mirashi.

Whatever the situation with the Nalas, and however distant from the *Daśakumāracarita* we stray, we know that by year 10 of Pṛthivīṣeṇa's reign he had restored the Royalty his family had lost during Narendrasena's inept reign. Although the year 2 inscription suggests a king of greatly diminished majesty, we cannot be sure whether Pṛthivīṣeṇa's restoration occurred before or after that year, for this grant's lackluster genealogy could be attributed to the fact that at that time a properly florid set of epithets not yet had been conceived. On the other hand, one might imagine that a prince who had just reclaimed his lands would make some mention of the fact, as he does in the grant for year 10. Whatever the case, it seems possible that the first period of disruption and hiatus at Ajaṇṭā was somehow connected with Pṛthivīṣeṇa reasserting his family's right to its territories.

Naturally no direct evidence exists for this hypothesis. The indirect evidence is two-fold. First, we know that Pṛthivīṣeṇa reclaimed his kingdom. If we assume, as we have, that the Vatsagulmas were the occupying force, this reconquest would likely have taxed the resources of both parties, and could surely account for the site's recession and

[142] C. R. Krishnamacharlu. "The Nala Inscription at Podagadh; 12th year," *Epigraphia Indica.* 21 (1931-32): 156-7.

hiatus. In light of Ajaṇṭā's relative chronology, any reconstructed history must explain why Caves 1, 17, 19 and 20 seem to have been worked upon during Spink's phase 2, when all other excavations at the site had stopped. One potential explanation is that these are the only caves at the site attributable to royal patrons. Spink posits Cave 1 as Hariṣeṇa's, and we 17, 19 and 20 were excavated for a feudatory ally of Hariṣeṇa. If Spink is correct, these royal caves were the only ones exempt from the sumptuary restrictions that constrained others in this troubled time. It is further possible, then, that Caves 17, 19, and 20 did not start up again because their patron died in the fight, leaving no heir. Hence this king's wealth and lands devolved to his liege, Hariṣeṇa. This may not be correct, or convincing, but given the lack of any basis for assuming a war between Cave 17's donor and a nameless King of Aśmaka, this is no less fantastic a reconstruction. As the reader must have noticed by now, the paucity of continuous evidence does not allow India's history to be recast except in terms of possibilities and probabilities, offering much food for the imagination.

Pṛthivīṣeṇa II's "rebellion" did not necessarily entail the dissolution of Hariṣeṇa's empire. Once activity at Ajaṇṭā resumed in earnest, it continued for some years uninterrupted. In Spink's chronology, this third phase ends with an apparently unexpected, but crucial event: Hariṣeṇa's sudden death. There is no reason to deviate from Spink on this matter.

Ajaṇṭā's fourth phase is characterized by a flurry of rushed activity, occasioned by the patrons' realization that central India's pax-Vākāṭaka was soon to end in a maelstrom. Again, there is no cause for challenging Spink's estimation of these patrons' psychology as expressed in the artifacts they left behind. But, there is scope for questioning whether his explanation of the events that occasioned their anxiety is warranted. Spink proposed that Hariṣeṇa's death was the impetus which allowed the evil Aśmakas to bring about the

Vākāṭakas' downfall. If the Aśmakas were the Vatsagulma Vākāṭakas, this reconstruction is not viable.

If Ajaṇṭā's third period ended with Hariṣeṇa's death, but the site continued for several years yet, who ruled the Vatsagulma Vākāṭaka empire? The answer: Hariṣeṇa's son, Sarvasena III. Unfortunately, no inscription or genealogical list exists, stating conclusively that Hariṣeṇa had a son or that his name was Sarvasena. Instead, this last member of the Vatsagulma Vākāṭaka lineage must be resurrected through a careful, tortuous reading of several grants from the Kadamba dynasty, who ruled from Vānavāsī to the Vākāṭakas' south (see Fig. 19).

Let us begin with the only inscription to preserve this name, the Mūdigera plate of Siṃhavarman.[143] This Mahārāja of the Kadamba family claims to have been a feudatory of a Mahārāja Sarvasena. Literally, Siṃhavarman was "honored by Mahārāja Sarvasena with coronation."[144]

This inscription raises as many problems as it solves, for Siṃhavarman does not give any further information through which to identify this Sarvasena. It is not even certain that this Sarvasena was a Vākāṭaka. Apropos this latter point, however, historians have universally taken the Sarvasena named in the Mūdigera plate to be a member of the Vatsagulma Vākāṭaka lineage because of this name's frequent use for members of this dynasty. But this presumption does not settle Sarvasena's identity, based as it is, on the acknowledgement that there are several Vākāṭaka Sarvasenas. If Siṃhavarman's lord was a Vākāṭaka, was it Hariṣeṇa's great great great grandfather Sarvasena I, his grandfather

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[143] Ajay Mitra Shastri. "The Mūdigera plates of Siṃhavarman and Vākāṭaka-Kadamba Relations." In *Indian Archaeological Heritage: Shri K.V. Soundara Rajan Festschrift.* Ed. by C. Magarbandhu et. al. (Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan, 1991); M. J. Sharma. "Relations between Vākāṭakas and Kadambas." In *The Age of the Vākāṭakas.* Ed. by A. M. Shastri. (New Delhi: Harman Publishing, 1992): 51-56.

[144] *sarvvasena mahārājena mūrddhā[bhiṣeken]ābhyarcchitaḥ* Sharma. "Relations between Vākāṭakas and Kadambas, 54. For a synoptic history of the Kadambas see Majumdar and Altekar. *Vākāṭaka-Gupta Age,* 235-246; Majumdar and Dasgupta. *Compreshensive History of India,* 363-366.

Sarvasena II, or a heretofore unknown son, Sarvasena III.

The first possibility can be rejected outright. In order to establish whether this Sarvasena was Hariṣeṇa's grandfather or his hypothetical son we have to determine the approximate years of Siṃhavarman's reign. To accomplish this one must know that Siṃhavarman was the great-great grandson of the Kadamba ruler Kākusthavarman and that a cousin of Siṃhavarman's, named Harivarman, was the great great great grandson of Kākusthavarman (fig. 19). This Harivarman issued a copper plate that can be dated through the grant's astrological data to "either Tuesday, the 22nd September 526 A.D., or Thursday, the 21st September 545 A.D.[145] This grant's modern editor deems the second date to be correct, and places Harivarman's accession in 538 C.E., far too late for him to be one generation younger than Hariṣeṇa's grandfather. Additionally, Siṃhavarman's son (or grandson, it is not clear which) was ruling Vanavāsī when it was sacked by the Cālukya Kīrttivarman I, who ruled circa 567-597.[146] Again, this fact makes it likely that there was a Vākāṭaka Sarvasena III, who ruled after Hariṣeṇa's death and who set Siṃhavarman upon the Kadamba throne.

We can now posit that after Hariṣeṇa's death, Sarvasena III took the mantle of Vākāṭaka kingship. Besides allowing us to posit with some certainly that Hariṣeṇa did have a successor, the relationship between Sarvasena and the Kadamba Siṃhavarman is important for understanding the end of the Vākāṭaka dynasty. Unfortunately, this connection requires yet another history lesson, including the names of more kings and dynasties: In days of yore, Siṃhavarman's grandfather, Kṛṣṇavarman I, overreached the bounds of his power, and was routed by the Pallava dynasty. As a result of this loss,

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[145] K. N. Dikshit. "Sangholi Plates of Hari-Varman: The 8th Year," *Epigraphia Indica*. 14 (1917-18): 165.

[146] Majumdar and Dasgupta. *A Comprehensive History,* 414-416.

Siṃhavarman's father, Viṣṇuvarman, was forced to accept investiture from the Pallavas.[147] Viṣṇuvarman and his Pallava masters were later killed in battle by his collateral nephew Ravivarman, who seems to have made the Kadamba empire strong and whole.[148] This brings us to Siṃhavarman. Because prior to these Mūdigera plates no record from Siṃhavarman had come to light, scholars had assumed that the defeat of Viṣṇuvarman quieted the Kadamba family feud for a spell under Ravivarman's rule. Siṃhavarman's Mūdigera plate shows that was not the case. Apparently, with the aid of the Vatsagulma Vākāṭakas Siṃhavarman struck back at his father's conquerors, and established his own power base. Later, Siṃhavarman's son conquered the remainder of the Kadamba lands, and established himself as the sole Kadamba suzerain.

An alliance between Sarvasena III and Siṃhavarman might have contributed to the Vākāṭakas' and Ajaṇṭa's decline by further taxing the resources of that family, which had been in decline since the collateral branch under Pṛthivīṣeṇa reasserted its strength.

The latter half of Hariṣeṇa's reign or initial years of Sarvasena III's saw additional troubles. These can be reconstructed through epigraphic records found in territories which Varāhadeva named as Hariṣeṇa's conquests (according to the accepted interpretation of his verse). The Traikūṭakas had been a powerful family in April of 457 C.E., when King Dahrasena noted in a land-grant that he had performed an Aśvamedha.[149] The next Trikūṭaka grant dates to 14 October 490 C.E., and represents Dahrasena's son, Vyāghrasena, as "lord of Aparānta and other prosperous countries acquired by his arms and inherited."[150] If Hariṣeṇa had ever taken these lands, they were now lost. Similarly, Varāhadeva

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[147] Majumdar and Dasgupta. *A Comprehensive History,* 364.

[148] John F. Fleet. "Sanskrit and Old Canarese Inscriptions," *Indian Antiquary.* 6: (1877): 30.

[149] Vasudev Vishnu Mirashi. *Inscriptions of the Kalachuri-Chedi Era.* Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, volume IV. (Ootacamund: Government Epigraphist for India, 1955), vol. 1, 24, l.ine 2.

[150] Mirashi. *Inscriptions of the Kalachuri-Chedi Era,* vol. 1, 28.

associates Hariṣeṇa with Avanti. But the Barwani plate of Subandhu dating to 486 C.E.,[151] and the Bāgh copper-plate issued by the same king of Māhiṣmatī in southern Avanti,[152] give one no reason to believe that Subandhu was under Vākāṭaka hegemony. Moreover, if Vidarbha was lost to Hariṣeṇa because of Pṛthivīṣeṇa's reassertion of sovereignty, then geography dictates that Kosala was lost as well. As for Andhra, the early Viṣṇukuṇḍin King Mādhavavarman II (c. 475-525) married a Vākāṭa[ka] princess according to the Chikkullā plates, albeit we do not know from which branch.[153] However, Mādhavavarman II claims to have performed eleven Aśvamedha sacrifices,[154] and is believed to have conquered much of Mahārāṣṭra,[155] perhaps filling the lacuna left by the Vākāṭaka decline.[156] Additional notices of a post-Vākāṭaka chaos in the region, which may or may not name figures actually responsible for that empire's demise, include the Thāḷner plates of Bhānuṣeṇa a Kumbhakarṇa chief,[157] and the Malhārā plates of Ādityarāja of the Muṇḍaputras.[158] Finally, although I introduced the Nalas as possibly the *Daśakumāracarita's* forest-dwelling enemy of Vidarbha, it is also possible that this family had a hand in the Vākāṭakas' *final* demise. For, despite whatever equivocations I offered in that discussion, the copper-plate issued by Bhaṭṭāraka Arthapati on behalf of Bhavadattavarman *was* issued from

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[151] Mirashi. "Historical Data in Daṇḍin's Daśakumāracarita," 17-19.

[152] Mirashi. *Inscriptions of the Kalachuri-Chedi Era*, vol. 1, 19-21.

[153] Kielhorn. "Chikkulla Plates of Vikramendravarman II," 96, line 10.

[154] Kielhorn. "Chikkulla Plates of Vikramendravarman II," 195, line 2.

[155] Ajay Mitra Shastri. *Early History of the Deccan Problems and Perspectives.* (Delhi: Sundeep Prakashan, 1987): 132-137.

[156] See Shastri *Early History of the Deccan,* 122-131 for a recent study of the Viṣṇukuṇḍin chronology.

[157] Ajay Mitra Shastri. "A Note on the Thalner Plates of Bhanushena," *Journal of the Epigraphical Society of India.* 12 (1985): 53-58.

[158] Ajay Mitra Shastri. "The Malhara Plates of Adityaraja: A Re-appraisal," *Journal of the Epigraphical Society of India.* 4 (1977): 30-41.

Nandivardhana, the Vidarbha Vākāṭakas' one-time capital.[159]

With the present data, we can never know how the Vākāṭaka lineage, and Ajaṇṭā, ended. The site suggests that this finale did not come as a matter of slow attrition of power and resources, but as the result of a cataclysm. Whatever may have been the cause thereof, it is possible that Pṛthivīṣeṇa II also suffered, for the undated Bālāghāṭ copper-plate introduces a new element into its celebration of this king: he is no longer the *magnavaṃśsyoddhatṛ*, one who raised up his fallen family, of the year 10 and 17 grants, here he is *dvimagnavaṃśsyoddhatṛ*, the rescuer of his *twice*-fallen family. How long Pṛthivīṣeṇa managed to support that family is not clear. There is no indication that he was followed by an heir. And Mirashi has called attention to the fact that even this Bālāghāṭ grant was "unfinished:" it lacks both the seal and the proofreader's mark of approval typically accompanying these grants, though a space was clearly left for the latter.[160] Like the artifacts at Ajaṇṭā, this grant suggests that the Vākāṭaka regimes were finished off in a final, sudden, and irreversible catastrophe.

In conclusion, Spink's relative chronology of Ajaṇṭā based upon a motival analysis established five levels of patronage. Based upon inscriptions from Ajaṇṭā and surrounding territories as well as the *Daśakumāracarita*, I have reconstructed a narrative to connect those levels. In Ajaṇṭā's pre-history, Devasena or Hariṣeṇa conquers the collateral branch of his family, and takes their lands for himself; he makes additional conquests at this time as well. The donor of Cave 17 may assist the Vākāṭaka lord in these campaigns. Some time in the peace after these events excavation at Ajaṇṭā begins after a several century hiatus. This is Spink's phase 1. Spink's phase 2 starts when Pṛthivīṣeṇa II, Hariṣeṇa's cousin, reasserts his sovereignty, and threatens or even begins to war on the Hariṣeṇa. The hiatus

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[159] Gupte. "Rithapur Plates of Bhavattavarman."

[160] Mirashi. *Inscriptions of the Vākāṭakas,* 80.

signals the height of this inter-Vākāṭaka violence, which ends in a stalemate: Pṛthivīṣeṇa regains control over Vidarbha; Hariṣeṇa is weakened though not routed. Work starts up again at Ajaṇṭā, beginning phase 3, which ends with some sort of catastrophe, perhaps Hariṣeṇa's death. According to Spink, Phase 4 is a time of hurried consolidation. Patrons might have perceived that the kings of Traikūṭa, Andhra, Avanti, and so on were planning to take advantage of the Vatsagulma Vākāṭaka's weakened state. Finally, the Vākāṭakas are overthrown; chaos engulfs the region, the site falls to pieces after a brief spurt of intrusive, haphazard patronage by resident monks and artisans.

This is only one possible history. It is the story I will tell when discussing Ajaṇṭā's Buddhism. I have balanced the need for a narrative to tell about the cave's progressive development with the paucity, intermittent nature, and truly wide latitude for interpretation of the available data through which that story is reconstructed. That this scheme also attempts to account for the swath of history suggested in the *Daśakumāra-carita* is a sop to those who swear by this text's historicity. The *Daśakumāracarita* is admittedly compelling insofar as it offers a consistent narrative within which to rehearse this rather incoherent data. Nevertheless, its worth as an historical document is by no means incontrovertible. As soon as this text begins to contradict other, better, data it must be discarded as mere story. Needless to add, in terms of provisionality, the *Daśakumāra-carita* is no less (in)secure than the reconstruction of Vākāṭaka history presented here.

CHAPTER II

BETWEEN THE MOTION AND THE ACT FALL THE SOURCES

Thus far in this extended preface to the Buddhism of Ajaṇṭā I have worked out a detailed, though problematic, overview of the extraordinary historical circumstances that affected Ajaṇṭā's patrons during its Vākāṭaka heyday. The next prolegomena requiring attention are of an evidential and methodological nature. What kinds of data does Ajaṇṭā provide? What kind of answers can be elicited from this data? What additional evidence may be brought to bear upon Ajaṇṭā from outside the site? How should those sources be read? This chapter will address these concerns in several stages. The first section treats the relationship between archaeological and textual sources for the recovery of Buddhism's history in India. This discussion is highly theoretic, drawing upon Piercean semiology, anthropology, and hermeneutics in its effort to elaborate the nature of the available evidence. Following that, I will present two examples of how not to go about the enterprise of bringing together art-historical and textual evidence in the study of Ajaṇṭā's Buddhism. Finally, the third section will delineate a 'canon' of literary sources that may be brought to bear upon the interpretation of Ajaṇṭā's native evidence.

Schopen, Archaeology, and Textual Possibilities

Since the publication of *Introduction à l'histoire du Buddhisme Indien*, which practically initiated the scholarly study of Indian Buddhism, Burnouf's dictum that, "the genuine sources through which it may be possible to know Indian Buddhism, the original

and purest sources, are the Sanskrit texts from Nepal, and . . . the Pāli books from Ceylon,"[1] has determined the field's methodological and evidential biases. The curriculum of work associated with the names of the field's luminaries -- T. W. Rhys Davids' leadership in the Pāli Text Society, L. de la Vallée Poussin's study of the *Abhidharmakośa*, É. Lamotte and the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra*, just to name a few -- is the renowned legacy of Burnouf's prediction. Indeed, the only review of Buddhist Studies as an independent field of scholarship, de Jong's *Brief History*, portrays Buddhist Studies as a predominantly philological endeavor, characterized in particular by its focus upon Buddhist texts. Taken in this light, the fact that de Jong did not find it "feasible to enumerate the important epigraphical and archaeological discoveries which relate to Buddhism"[2] is as much an indication of the field's methodological heritage as of the personal competencies de Jong brought to the authorship of his history.

More recently, a number of scholars have begun to challenge this established pattern of scholarship. Most prominent among them is Gregory Schopen, whose work has included calls for reformation of the field, to transform it from the practice of a "History of Religions" into an "Archaeology of Religions." This alternate field of study is introduced thus:

> It is hardly revolutionary to suggest that, had the academic study of religions started quite literally on the ground, it would have been confronted with very different problems. It would have had to ask very different questions and it would have produced very different solutions. It would, in short, have become not the 'History of Religions' -- which was and is essentially text bound -- but the 'Archaeology of Religions'. It would have used texts, of course, but only those that could be shown to have been actually known or read at a given place at a given time, or to have governed or shaped the kinds of religious behavior that had left traces on the ground. In fact texts would have been judged significant only if they

[1] Eugène Burnouf. *Introduction à l'histoire du Buddhisme Indien.* (Paris: Adrien Maisonneuve, 1876): 12.

[2] J. W. de Jong. *A Brief History of Buddhist Studies in Europe and America.* (Delhi: Sri Satguru, 1987): 37.

> could be shown to be related to what religious people actually did. This archaeology of religions would have been primarily occupied with three kinds of things then: religious constructions and architectures, inscriptions, and art historical remains. In a more general sense, it would have been preoccupied *not* with what small, literate, almost exclusively male and certainly atypical professionalized sub-groups wrote, but rather, with what religious people of all segments of a given religious community actually did and how they lived.[3]

Clearly one can see the influence this Archaeology of Religions has had upon my own project: Ajaṇṭā has little to offer besides a wealth of inscriptions, architectures, and art-historical remains, and I fully intend to focus upon written texts that can be shown to have been known the local Buddhist community. Nor has Schopen's work been instrumental for my formulations alone. His is arguably among the most influential voices in Buddhist studies today. Yet, I have not come across a single considered critique of his scholarly corpus. For this reason, as an introduction to my use of the archaeological and textual sources within this project, I will appraise Schopen's scholarly program to explain how my own project diverges therefrom. While doing so, I may also clarify what it means for Ajaṇṭā's remains to be signs of the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha in the complex culture of ancient India.

In a recent statement of his programme, Schopen suggests that Buddhist studies' traditional focus upon textual materials is symptomatic of a more profound etiology within the Western study of religions. That is, he finds a historical basis for this privileging of texts in the efforts of sixteenth-century Reformation ideologues such as Zwingli, Karlstadt, Calvin: Protestants who sought to fix the spirit of "True Religion" in the religious Word, as opposed to material objects and ritual behaviors which they considered the superstitious idolatry of Catholics. Schopen writes, "The methodological position taken by modern Buddhist scholars, archaeologists, and historians of religion looks . . . uncannily like the

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[3] Gregory Schopen. "Burial '*Ad Sanctos*' and the Physical Presence of the Buddha in Early Indian Buddhism," *Religion.* 17 (1987): 193-4.

position taken by a variety of early Protestant 'reformers' who were attempting to define and establish the locus of 'true religion.'"[4] In these terms, the division between a text-based History of Religions and Schopen's proposed Archaeology is founded less upon the choice of sources than within "a debate about where religion as an object of investigation is to be located."[5] Texts and archaeological evidence are, instead, emblematic of the two sides of this debate. One who holds to the view of true religion as a system of Eternal Truths is bound to find religion's most philosophically just articulation in textual materials, which are discursive in nature; the view of religion as "what religious people of all segments of a given religious community actually did and how they lived," transfers the focus from known to knower, emphasizing religious artifacts and behaviors as articulations of religious knowledge. In Schopen's view, the former position is both methodologically unsound and historically invalid, for "the ascription of primacy to textual sources in Buddhist studies not only effectively neutralizes the independence of archaeological sources and epigraphical sources as witnesses, it also effectively excludes what practicing Buddhists did and believed from the history of their own religion."[6] By finding religion in the latter locus, as revealed in the source materials for an Archaeology of Religions, Schopen counters the Reformation.

Surely, as a corrective for the field, Schopen's claim that textual sources alone cannot be treated as embodiments of the religion's True Spirit and therefore as the location of "real" or "correct" Indian Buddhism is to be embraced. However, the danger of any strongly stated position is that it can be too strongly stated. Schopen says that the debate is ultimately over "location" not sources, but his rhetoric is inconsistent. Whereas Schopen

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[4] Gregory Schopen. "Archaeology and Protestant Presuppositions in the Study of Indian Buddhism," *History of Religions.* 31 (1991): 19.

[5] Schopen. "Archaeology and Protestant Presuppositions," 23.

[6] Schopen. "Archaeology and Protestant Presuppositions," 14.

does include on some level "all segments of a given community" within his Archaeology of Religions, he is also quick to devalue the participation of the "atypical professionalized sub-group," even though contemporary witnesses like Fa-Hien, Hsüan-Tsang and I-Tsing demonstrate that this group possessed influence and wealth well in excess of its numbers. Just as surely as we know that some members of the Indian Buddhist community commissioned Buddha figures, there is no denying that some produced, read and debated philosophical treatises as part of their *actual practice*. It would appear that Schopen is in fact less concerned with locating Indian Buddhism in actual practice on-the-ground than in bringing to light *popular,* or *affective*, or *folk*, or *syncretic* dimensions of the religion that were not represented in the writings of the Indian scholastic elite and that therefore have been largely neglected by Western scholars.

As a Sanskritist will recognize, Schopen's work may be revolutionary for the field, but it is no *āśrayaparāvṛtti*, no "revolution of the basis." The Protestant presupposition Schopen discusses was actually two-fold: the concern to locate a true religion first presupposes a "true religion" to locate. Rather than remove the bane of "true religion" altogether, however, Schopen instead locates it in the subject of his Archaeology: the actual deeds of actual people. Accordingly, he intimately links the matter of location to that of sources: "the choice of sources for the scholar interested in knowing what Indian Buddhism had been *would seem obvious*."[7] In Schopen's reading of the field's history, the *obvious* choice was not made because the blinders of Protestant presuppositions caused scholars to overlook the value of archaeological source materials as "historical witnesses"[8] and "adequate reflections of historical reality."[9] Schopen's directive for the field, based

[7] Schopen. "Archaeology and Protestant Presuppositions," 3; emphasis mine.

[8] Schopen. "Archaeology and Protestant Presuppositions," 3.

[9] Schopen. "Archaeology and Protestant Presuppositions," 5.

upon these observations, is strongly stated:

> There is . . . for the vast majority of [archaeological] sites, no evidence that the canonical sources we know were known or used by the communities that lived there. These sources have, in this sense, no *direct* documentary value at all. If the study of Indian Buddhism is ever to be anything other than the study of what appears to be an idealizing and intentionally archaizing literature, if it is ever to deal directly with how this religion was actually practiced in actual local monasteries, these facts will have to be fully confronted, however uncomfortable that might be.[10]

This polemic is appealing, especially as my own study falls on the side of the precious few that concern themselves with Indian Buddhism on the local level. Nevertheless, I cannot accept it in this form for two reasons, the first is site-specific, the second involves a conflict between Schopen and myself concerning the nature of archaeological sources.

First, as an elite monastic site, Ajaṇṭā stands apart from "the vast majority of [archaeological] sites" in that there *is* evidence for literary sources having been known there; these will be enumerated at the end of this chapter. Ajaṇṭā's local Buddhism cannot be studied without appeal to scholastic texts, popular literary texts, Hindu texts, and Buddhist canonical texts alike. Indeed, some of the statements gleaned from Ajaṇṭā's inscriptions attached to lay donations reveal a doctrinally sophisticated community:

vyastadoṣaprahāṇād . . . padam aśokaṃ nirjvaraṃ śāntam āryyaṃ[11]
the peaceful and noble state free from sorrow and disease, [attained] by eradicating the many faults

anūcivāṃ so 'pi hi yasya hṛdgatāṃ vidanṛvadhyāśa[ya]śuddhisampadam[12]
[the donor] too was repeating in his heart [the teaching called], The Perfect Equality of Affect Towards the Wise Man and Criminal [Alike]

sarvvajñatā ca praṇidhānasiddhi[ḥ][13]

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[10] Gregory Schopen. "An Old Inscription from Amarāvatī and the Cult of the Local Monastic Dead in Indian Buddhist Monasteries," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies.* 14 (1992): 317.

[11] App. A, No. 67, line 27.

[12] App. A, No. 77, line 18.

[13] App. A, No. 77, line 19.

omniscience -- the fulfillment of [a bodhisattva's] vows

anābhogavibuddhabuddhir buddhābhidhāno[14]
he, called Buddha, whose Intelligence bloomed effortlessly

A more significant problem in Schopen's work, however, stems from the fact that it treats archaeological materials as if they adequately and transparently reflect the social significance of actual practices on the ground. Elite literary productions are devalued in his work as 1) in most cases without a specifiable provenance in space or time, 2) redacted, 3) heavily edited and 4) ideological and/or nomological.[15] Archaeological sources, by contrast, are 1) "reasonably well located in time and space," 2) "largely 'unedited'" and 3) they "record or reflect at least part of what Buddhists -- both lay-people and monks -- *actually* practiced and believed."[16]

From the essay "Archaeology and Protestant Presuppositions," I have twice cited Schopen as pairing actual practice and actual belief as the two species of information which archaeological materials yield and which textual sources cannot. In an elaboration of this same idea, Schopen writes that the "considerable human efforts that very likely produced what we see in the archaeological record of Buddhist sacred sites . . . [are] indicators of value."[17] Let us focus upon this latter phrasing, for however innocent Schopen's use of "indicator" in this passage, by characterizing archaeological evidence with such terminology, Schopen opens himself up to a Piercean semiological analysis.

For Piercean semiology, a sign is a source of information or knowledge. There are three parts to the Piercean sign: the *sign* itself, the *object*, and the *interpretant*. In the

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[14] App. A, No. 98, line 1.

[15] Schopen. "Archaeology and Protestant Presuppositions," 2-3.

[16] Schopen. "Archaeology and Protestant Presuppositions," 1-2; emphasis mine.

[17] Gregory Schopen. "*Stūpa* and *Tīrtha*: Tibetan Mortuary Practices and an Unrecognized Form of Burial Ad Sanctos at Buddhist Sites in India." In *The Buddhist Forum, Volume III*. Ed. by Tadeusz Skorupski and Ulrich Pagel. (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1994): 292-93.

words of E. Valentine Daniel: "Objects may exist in the universe as individual empiricities or existent facts, but they do not become real until and unless they are represented by a sign, which representation is interpreted as such by an interpretant."[18] I introduce the Piercean sign at this moment because Schopen's claim that signs (physical remains) and objects (values) are directly linked by contiguity or concurrence can be directly translated into Piercean terms under the rubric of the *index.* As Daniel puts it, "indexical signs are what we call facts."[19] By positing that individuals' values can be recovered directly through a recovery of material artifacts Schopen is suggesting that an indexical relationship obtains between archaeological evidence and values.

However, Schopen's explication of this indexical relationship between signs and the object they signify does not account for the third term of the Piercean sign, the interpretant. That is, although a sign, *as index*, does not rely upon the work of an interpretant, *as a sign* it does. There are facts, but no bare facts. As a Piercean sign, even an index is complex and irreducible. Because of its *triune* structure, the sign is always its own first element and therefore recursive, leaving open the possibility of a glissade between the sign and its own representations as 'sign.' Further, the sign is always already other than itself, for to be significant it requires the work of an interpretant, which unites sign and object. To paraphrase Geertz, the signified object too is suspended in webs of significance. In short, a Piercean sign can never have a static meaning such as Schopen's arguments imply. Schopen would have archaeological evidence be adequate to the values it represents. But according to Piercean semiology, one draws ever further from the *object* as one draws closer to the sign in its totality, its complex locus of meaning. Archaeological materials exist, they prove there were values, but archaeological remains cannot *in their*

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[18] E. Valentine Daniel. *Fluid Signs: Being a Person the Tamil Way.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984): 19.

[19] Daniel. *Fluid Signs,* 31-2.

material aspect alone index/indicate what those values were.[20]

What I am getting at here is the problem of *ideology*. The use of this "keyword" is of course itself ideologically charged. Here I am invoking the sense given the term by Georges Dumézil as redacted by J. Z. Smith: a people "as observed need not correspond to their own systematic statements about themselves."[21] This was the starting point for Schopen's own criticism that Buddhist texts often promote doctrines and ideals which diverge markedly from the beliefs, concerns, and interests that actually motivated Buddhists; in this way, scholarship based upon texts alone would be irreducibly

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[20] Schopen recognizes that archaeological remains retain only a "part" of Indian Buddhism's beliefs and practices ("Archaeology and Protestant Presuppositions," 2). And I agree that archaeological evidence is invaluable, even preferable, when it is used as a *positive* indicator of a particular practice or belief. Yet, *negative arguments from archaeology, arguments which draw conclusions from the lack of specific evidence, should be avoided, or made with only the greatest circumspection*. I state this point so strongly for several reasons. First, there is the problem of excavation: Major archaeological sites, such as Sārnāth, Sāñcī and Nāgārjunakoṇḍa, were incompletely excavated and documented during the earlier parts of this century and the last (little work has been done on historical archaeology since Independence). Indeed, the site of Amarāvatī is as famous for the destruction done to it by the local Zamindar, who used the slabs for building materials and tunneled into the stūpa seeking treasure, as for the glorious remains themselves. See Dilip K. Chakrabarti's *A History of Indian Archaeology: From the Beginning to 1947* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1988) for the sad history of Indian archaeological studies and excavation. Second, only certain types of practice would have left physical artifacts to be studied a millennium or more after the fact. A case in point is the "ordinary-people's" *tsha-tsha* discussed in Schopen's article, "Stūpa and Tīrtha." These *tsha-tsha* would have been clay tablets encasing the remains of devout Buddhists. However, because the *tsha-tsha* are supposed to have been deposited near a stūpa without themselves being protected from the elements in any way, they now no longer exist. Instead, this Indian practice is reconstructed through literary accounts and modern Tibetan burial rituals. Similarly, at Ajaṇṭā, there is no evidence whatsoever for any form of burial practice, although the site was used on and off by monks from at least the 1st century B.C.E until the late 5th century C.E. This may suggest that at Ajaṇṭā the dead were disposed of in an archaeologically untraceable manner, a manner that may have to be reconstructed through the use of texts, a manner as simple as cremation and then dispersal in the nearby river. Schopen's programmatic statement for his "Archaeology" allows texts "that could be shown to have . . . governed or shaped the kinds of religious behavior that left traces on the ground." The simple fact is, there may have been many religious behaviors that have not, did not, or could not leave such traces but may still be represented in texts. Archaeological evidence alone is insufficient for a third reason. That is, the ideals and systems of beliefs represented in the Buddhist textual traditions may not all be proper to archaeological representation. When aspects of religious life such as philosophical tenets, cult affiliation, vinaya affiliation, and the like are examined, one's approach to each must rely upon an hermeneutic sensitive to and respectful of the discursive or material contexts from which its categories derive.

[21] Jonathan Z. Smith. *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987): 40.

ideological. In his stronger programmatic statements, Schopen does not attempt to resolve this conflict, to align the two sets of sources within a higher-order unity. Instead, he treats the archaeological evidence as signs indexical of both practice and the values associated with that practice: "adequate reflections of historical reality" rather than "contrived ideal paradigms."[22] But, the possibility of ideology is the possibility that material remains are not adequate reflections of individuals' religious beliefs, that individuals might partake of religious practices for unknown and unknowable reasons, and that the paradigms preserved in the artifactual by-products of ritual action might be no less "contrived" than those expressed in literary sources.

Schopen's programme for an 'Archaeology of Religions' valorizes actual belief and actual practice as the two species of information of greatest interest to the 'archaeologist' for whom material artifacts are the surest source. I have reviewed two problems with this position. First, such evidence is semiological in nature, and therefore open to a never-ending cycle of interpretation; second, it is potentially ideological, and therefore caught in a tension between ideality and reality. These analyses are brought together in the work of anthropologist Roy Rappaport, through a distinction he draws between 'belief' and 'acceptance.' For Rappaport, belief and acceptance are two modes of personal involvement in matters religious, but, as Rappaport stipulates, "Belief [is] . . . some sort of inward state knowable subjectively, if at all. Acceptance, in contrast, is not a private state but a *public act*, visible to both the witnesses and the performer himself."[23] This is to say, by participating in a public religious act "the performer accepts, and indicates to himself and others that he accepts, whatever is encoded in the canon of the liturgical order in which he

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[22] Schopen. "Archaeology and Protestant Presuppositions," 5.

[23] Roy A. Rappaport. *Ecology, Meaning, and Religion.* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1979): 194.

is participating."[24] The analytical utility of Rappaport's distinction lies in the following corollary: no matter what one's personal motivation for involving oneself in a public religious act -- whether it is because one privately believes in the efficacy, canons, or ideals encoded therein, or because one is simply playing to community expectations -- the artifacts left by such participation can be treated as indices of a total religious fact.

The distinction between acceptance and belief means that no necessary connection exists between one's public religious actions and one's true motivations for performing those actions -- which could be the fulfillment of social expectation or sumptuary display or the desire for prestige and attendant power or the expression of a deeply felt religious conviction. Nevertheless, ritual performance does provide certain information. The very fact of participation is an index that at least publicly one is accepting the value and efficacy of the rite and the *canonical* information encoded in its liturgy. In Schopen's words, this is an "indicator of value."[25] Yet, canonical information, "concerned with enduring aspects of nature, society, or cosmos,"[26] is not similarly indexed by the bare fact of performance. Instead Rappaport observes, "canonical information itself rests ultimately upon symbols,"[27] using 'symbol' in a consciously Piercean sense: "a symbol is merely 'associated by law' or convention with that which it signifies."[28] Daniel clarifies further, "In a symbol the conventional sign, object, and representamen are brought together within the sign relation by virtue of an agreement and *not by virtue of any quality intrinsic to either object or*

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[24] Rappaport. *Ecology, Meaning, and Religion*, 193; fully italicized in the original.

[25] Schopen. "*Stūpa* and *Tīrtha*," 293.

[26] Rappaport. *Ecology, Meaning, and Religion*, 182.

[27] Rappaport. *Ecology, Meaning, and Religion*, 182.

[28] Rappaport. *Ecology, Meaning, and Religion*, 180.

representamen."[29] This canonical message is the "value" that, according to Schopen, the creation of archaeological materials indexes. But being symbolic, there can be no possibility that these materials are transparent revelations of the meaning, significance or content of those values. Whereas an actor may or may not choose to perform a ritual -- or choose between various ritual forms -- once accepted, the chosen liturgy and canonical messages alike contain little or no personal information: the canonical message is "encoded in apparently invariant aspects of [the] liturgical order"[30] and the "sequence of formal acts and utterances [are] not encoded by the performers" themselves.[31]

Indian Buddhist archaeological remains are the result of conventionalized public actions set in an indefinite web of interpretation, which continues to be spun up to the present day. In short, no matter what one's source of data, scholarship cannot span the ideological gap. Only ritual performance bridges the ideological gap, making socially real the socially ideal canons encoded in a liturgy.

In these terms, we can see Schopen's problem is that he equates "actual belief" with the canon realized in ritual. He assumes that archaeological evidence provides transparent evidence for actual practice and belief alike. It is no wonder then that archaeological material is Schopen's *obvious choice*. If artifacts do offer an entre to Indian Buddhist *belief*, it is methodologically unsound to valorize the other, less historically secure, source of belief: texts. We see, however, that archaeological material does not encode belief but is the indexical sign of a public canon encoded in polysemic symbols.

This analysis can go another step further. J. Z. Smith claims that ritual is the means through which humans negotiate the ideological split between ideality and actuality at the

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[29] Daniel. *Fluid Signs*, 32; emphasis added.

[30] Rappaport. *Ecology, Meaning, and Religion*, 182.

[31] Rappaport. *Ecology, Meaning, and Religion*, 175.

existential level:

> Ritual is a means of performing the way things ought to be in conscious tension to the way things are. . . . Ritual gains force where incongruency is perceived and thought about.[32]

In other words, ritual can never be treated solely on the level of the socially real, for it requires an ideology, a sense of the-way-things-ought-to-be, from which life in its complexity might and will differ. There can be no doubt that, as Schopen put it, "Indian Buddhism is very much more than the sum of its *śāstras*,"[33] its sūtras too. But without a knowledge of "what a small atypical part of the Buddhist community wanted that community to believe or practice"[34] as contained in textual material "intended--at the very least--to inculcate an ideal,"[35] the evidence for what they did practice and value will stand ever only half known. The archaeological sign is the sign of an ancient acceptance, whose meaning can only be fathomed in an explication of the canons accepted. The very phrase "accepted canon" bespeaks actuality and norm alike, actual practice *and* textual ideal. Schopen's suggestions as to the irrelevance of traditional scholarship on Buddhism -- "it has never been established that [certain ideals established in texts] had any impact on actual behavior"[36] or "the texts we are to study to arrive at a knowledge of 'Buddhism' may not even have been known to the vast majority of practicing Buddhists--both monk and lay"[37] -- may be premature. The fact of ritual performance requires the fact of an ideology, a norm.

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[32] Smith. *To Take Place*, 109-10.

[33] Gregory Schopen. "The Buddha as an Owner of Property and Permanent Resident in Medieval Indian Monasteries," *Journal of Indian Philosophy*. 18 (1990): 205.

[34] Schopen. "Archaeology and Protestant Presuppositions," 3.

[35] Schopen. "Archaeology and Protestant Presuppositions," 3.

[36] Schopen. "An Old Inscription from Amarāvatī," 317.

[37] Schopen. "Archaeology and Protestant Presuppositions," 5.

Smith presented 'ideology' as a marker of difference between norm and actuality; ritual, as the existential means for bridging that gap. To move forward with this analysis, Smith's understanding of 'ideology' may be supplemented by that of Terry Eagleton, who defines ideology as "the link or nexus between discourses and power."[38] Where one finds nomological speech, there one finds the potential for social power. Where one finds ritual, there one finds the integration of nomological discourse with society itself. In short, by linking Smith's and Eagleton's conceptions of 'ideology,' I am proposing that the real social power of *Buddhism* as a participant in Indian society lay within Buddhism's normative discourses. Any attempt to recover Buddhism 'on the ground' through material artifacts must simultaneously consider this religion's more 'ethereal' dimensions, contained in its discursive materials.

Moreover, this matter cannot be reduced through the sociological differentiation of Buddhism into a religion of the educated elites and one of the folk. Militating against such an institutional split, Schopen himself has shown that members of the educated elite participated in or even innovated so-called popular practices.[39] Furthermore, the converse position will hold true as well: the discourses of elite religion cannot have been altogether unknown to the folk. As I noted above, one finds various points of doctrine referred to in Ghaṭotkaca's and Caves 16's and 17's verse inscriptions. This latter point may best be clarified by appeal to scholarship on society and religion in Medieval Europe, a body of work that has greatly influenced Schopen. Writing on the "implications of literacy," Brian Stock observes that in the Medieval period, "oral discourse effectively began to function

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[38] Terry Eagleton. *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983): 210.

[39] Cf. Gregory Schopen. "Two Problems in the History of Indian Buddhism: The Layman/Monk Distinction and the Doctrines of the Transference of Merit," *Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik*. 10 (1984): 9-47; Gregory Schopen. "On Monks, Nuns and 'Vulgar' Practices: The Introduction of the Image Cult into Indian Buddhism," *Artibus Asiae*. 49 (1988-89): 153-68.

within a universe of communications governed by texts. On many occasions actual texts were not present, but people often thought or behaved as if they were. Texts thereby emerged as a reference system both for everyday activities and for giving shape to many larger vehicles of explanation."[40] Christian Europe was formed through a dynamic interaction between and synthesis of scholarly and popular cultures alike. The texts and experiences of the literati are not to be devalued in the effort to recover the experiences of ordinary people.[41]

Adapting this latter point to fit the above discourse on ideology and ritual, one may view scholarly and popular cultures as developing simultaneously within what Foucault has called "a régime of truth,"[42] wherein knowledge is not innocent but an exercise of power. At its most insidious, this power/knowledge "seeps into the very grain of individuals, reaches right into their bodies, permutes their gestures, their posture, what they say, how they learn to live and work with other people."[43] And given that at the most basic level ritual is gestural, ritual can be viewed, at the most basic level, as an expression of the participant's subjugation within a particular régime of truth. Thus I search at Ajaṇṭā for the ways that Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha seeped into the very grain of the site, reaching right into its caves, and permuted its icons, their gestures, what they "say." Iconographies, didactic decorative schemes, the use or avoidance of common epigraphic formulae, the adoption of significant epithets, public participation in one or another sub-

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[40] Brian Stock. *The Implications of Literacy.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983): 3.

[41] See John van Engen ("The Christian Middle Ages as an Historiographical Problem," *The American Historical Review.* 91 [1986]: 519-552) for a review of medieval historiography containing a strong statement of the need to understand 'scholarly' and 'popular' cultures as interdependent and mutually influential.

[42] Michel Foucault. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings 1972 - 1977.* Ed. by Colin Gordon. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980): 131.

[43] Cited in Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby (eds). *Feminism and Foucault.* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988): 6.

sect are all forms of information, all signs of knowledge. The Ajaṇṭā Caves are themselves signs of their community's knowledge of and, therefore, attempt to exert power over their environment *on every level.*

Here is the point at which my project diverges from that of Schopen. We concur that archaeological evidence, or the evidence allowed within his programmatic statement of an Archaeology of Religions, is the best entre into recovering Buddhism's history. We diverge in that Schopen understands these source materials as being the repository of "demonstratable facts,"[44] possessing "real significance,"[45] leading to "what we definitely know."[46] One finds the word "actual" as a constant refrain throughout his corpus, used less as an adjective than a deixis of positive value. With the repeated assertions I made vis-à-vis the constructed, tentative nature of my history for Ajaṇṭā in the preceding chapter, and presently with this discussion of the semiological and irreducibly ideological nature of Ajaṇṭā's artifacts, it should be clear that my choice and use of sources in writing Ajaṇṭā's religious history does not start from the base-line criterion that my data must possess a *verifiable correspondence* to some sort of objective actuality.

In many ways, the difference between our approaches comes down to a problematic important to the philosophy of science. Schopen's take on *the fact* is characteristic of the so-called *Received View* of scientific theories. Within this view, theories are systems of axioms wherein strict rules of correspondence dictate the linguistic expression of empirical observations.[47] Here, empirical observation is the absolute

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[44] Gregory Schopen. "The Inscription on the Kuṣān Image of Amitābha and the Character of the Early Mahāyāna in India," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies.* 10 (1987): 124.

[45] Schopen. "The Inscription on the Kuṣān Image of Amitābha," 124.

[46] Schopen. "Two Problems in the History of Indian Buddhism," 11.

[47] This definition is a paraphrase of Frederick Suppe. *The Semantic Conception of Theories and Scientific Realism*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989): 415.

prerequisite for all theoretic speech; and, in the ideal, such discourse refers only to observed entities. This view is directly paralleled in Schopen's assertion (I paraphrase from above) that canonical sources which cannot be directly linked to an Indian Buddhist community have no direct documentary value for recovering that community's beliefs, practices, and ideals; when the theoretic speech of Buddhism's canonical sources has no empirical referent in an archaeological artifact it has no interpretive value. Further, the Received View's inductive empiricism occasions a certain methodological consciousness as well, a *strong operational imperative*: "The only theory formulations which may be employed are those in which theoretical terms are operationally defined."[48] Again, as Schopen would ideally have it, only evidence directly found at an archaeological site can provide any factual and really significant information about the religion of that site's community.

Schopen's sympathy for the Received View is patent. None can deny that Schopen's novel approach to Indian Buddhism has led him to uncover practices and beliefs that were heretofore ignored within the field. Yet he is working from a model and methodology that have been long discredited within, at least, the philosophy of science (not to mention philosophy in general and the theory of history, as well as critical theory, anthropology, and even archaeology itself):

> by 1963 [the Received View] of theories and accompanying positivistic views on scientific theorizing were coming under increasing attack. . . . These and subsequent attacks were so successful that by 1969 the Received View had been generally discredited. Moreover, the Received View was so central to the entire positivistic program in philosophy of science that its rejection called into question the entire positivist portrait of science: Its views on discovery and the growth of scientific knowledge, reduction, explanation, observation, induction, and so on, became increasingly suspect and a matter of critical debate. Today virtually every significant part of the positivistic viewpoint has been found wanting and rejected by

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[48] Suppe. *The Semantic Conception of Theories,* 86.

> philosophy of science.[49]

In trying to treat archaeological material as empirical data for a factual reconstruction of actual practices and actual beliefs of actual people, Schopen has not recognized that even science treats its facts as, in fact, contextual, intertextual *texts*. The more contemporary model within philosophy of science rejects the idea that theories are statements about an objective world induced from an observation of empirical facts. Instead, theories have two aspects. First they are composed of nothing more than a set of systemic local features defined more or less arbitrarily; the universe encompassed within these set features is the universe to which truth claims and hypotheses refer. Second, there is a necessity to elaborate the relationship between this theory structure and the empirical world:

> One specifies a theory and asserts a theoretical hypothesis claiming that real-world phenomena . . . stand in some mapping relationship to the theory structure whereby that structure models the dynamic behavior of the phenomena.[50]

The crucial point is this: within this latter paradigm "the laws of theory do not specify what that mapping relationship [between model and 'reality'] is.[51] Like the Piercean icon, this mapping relationship is set by convention.[52] Within Schopen's paradigm, the

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[49] Suppe. *The Semantic Conception of Theories*, 415.

[50] Suppe. *The Semantic Conception of Theories,* 4.

[51] Suppe. *The Semantic Conception of Theories,* 4.

[52] One important vector of this theoretics is its correspondence to J. Z. Smith's explication of the Sacred: "Sacrality is, above all a category of emplacement. . . . A sacred text is one that is used in a sacred place -- nothing more is required" (*To Take Place*, 104). In other words, something is sacred because it occurs within a "state space" whose theory structure defines it as *sacred*. For scientists, a theory structure is articulated in terms of its model's local features. For religion, this function is served by ritual: "Ritual is not an expression of or a response to 'the Sacred;' rather, something or someone is made sacred by ritual" (*To Take Place*, 105) because "ritual is, first and foremost, a mode of paying attention" (*To Take Place*, 103), demarcating place. Rituals create universes of meaning that bear no necessary relationship to anything outside themselves, yet both are significant insofar as human beings, their creators, can utilize these models pragmatically by stipulating mapping relationships, i.e., ideologies. Suppe himself comes close to bringing these two areas of human interest together:

> The mapping relations employed in asserting theories are *counterfactual.* Thus theories do not purport to describe how phenomenal systems *actually* behave, but rather how they *ought* to behave under certain conditions which typically do not obtain. . . . [B]oth theoretical science and moral and social deliberations are

correspondence is treated as implicit in the theory; in Piercean terminology, again, such theories are indexical. Because Schopen conceives of an organic relationship between archaeological evidence and the "actual," such evidence is the "obvious" source for recovering actual practice and belief. For me, this evidence has certain physical and historical properties that make it preferable to textual sources for the phenomena I choose to study. But because I see this data as semeiotic, with the dissertation itself as the pragmatic interpretant, I see the data as no less "textual" than literary texts.

In terms of scholarly practice, what this means is that, very much like this introduction, archaeological sources can be viewed as "a tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable centers of culture," in Roland Barthes' words.[53] Perhaps Schopen recognizes this too. If so, his fidelity to the operational imperative restricts his ability to explore the range of possible cultural significances of archaeological signs. For instance, explaining what he calls *burial ad sanctos* (or alternately *deposito ad sanctos*), Schopen finds this rite fascinating because it combines a text's, the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra's*, pronouncement that a divine rebirth is assured for those who die in the Buddha's presence with a

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> concerned with *how the world ought to be*. (*The Semantic Conception of Theories,* 280.)

We have already seen that for the ritual/sacred nexus, the mapping is meaningful insofar as it resolves ideology as "a relationship of difference between 'nows' -- the now of everyday life and the now of ritual place" (*To Take Place*, 110). This relativizing of the Sacred, like contemporary philosophy of science's relativizing of Truth, into the product of a mediate, conventional mapping between a theoretical model and the "real-world" is not for everybody, as we see in Kees Bolles charged characterization of Smith's characterization: "What are we left with? What has religion come to? It has certainly cut all ties with *das ganz Andere*, although some others had already seen to that with some degree of success. Religion has become a mental operation that does not even depend on history. Rather, it is a habitual pattern of thought we can detect in certain people who delude themselves into submission to a superhuman authority or an excuse for what they do. It is fortunate that we are now in a position to look through it all" (Kees W. Bolles. "Imagining Religion," Review of *To Take Place: Toward a Theory in Ritual*, by Jonathan Z. Smith. *History of Religions*. 30 [1990]: 207). One may or may not regret this loss of innocence. But there can be no doubt that any theory which discusses ritual as being "a matter of given, very human activities and desires for power over places" (Bolles. "Imagining Religion," 211) cannot be too quickly discarded when one is studying artifacts of ritual such as the Ajaṇṭā Caves.

[53] Barthes is cited in Jonathan Culler. *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982): 33.

"popular" belief, not to be found in texts, that some stūpas contained the Buddha's continuing presence.[54] This is a valuable insight, contributing greatly to our knowledge of Indian Buddhist funeral practices. But something is still missing. For Schopen also demonstrates that contemporary Hinduism possessed the same set of practices, with the same ideological justification: deposit a piece of a dead person in the proximity of a sacred site, empowered by the presence of the local god, and that person is assured of a divine rebirth.[55] That Buddhists disposed of their dead is hardly surprising; that they did so in a manner morphologically and ideologically akin to the Hindu is also not remarkable. But this is where Schopen's analysis ends, for this is where his *positive* sources end. He can show Buddhist monks to have been "influenced and motivated as much by Indian mores, beliefs, and 'legal' conventions, as by specifically Buddhist doctrines,"[56] but cannot explain why, given that these men were so profoundly "Indian," they chose to become Buddhist monks. He cannot tell us about their heaven.

To attempt this latter would require one to dive into the great ocean of intertextuality, perchance to drown, for it is only in this sea of texts that the social ideal is properly articulated. It is here that the material is available for investigating the "multi-modal"[57] nature of these signs -- as indices of acceptance, icons of the accepted canons, or value-laden symbols -- depending upon an interpreter's motivated interest therein. If we ignore this source of interpretation, and look at just what practitioners *do*, or just the artifacts of their actions, we will see only a sliver of the significance. To give what Geertz has called a "thick description" of these artifacts, it is necessary to first acknowledge that

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[54] Schopen. "Burial '*Ad Sanctos*,'" 196.

[55] Schopen. "Stūpa and Tīrtha."

[56] Gregory Schopen. "On Avoiding Ghosts and Social Censure: Monastic Funerals in the Mūlasarvāstivāda-Vinaya," *Journal of Indian Philosophy*. 20 (1992): 21.

[57] Daniel. *Fluid Signs*," 39.

when it comes to signs, "complexities are possible, if not practically without end, at least logically so."[58] And it is necessary to acknowledge that because of these potential layers of meaning, thick description is only possible when one does not restrict oneself to the very few texts that "could be shown to . . . have governed religious behaviour that had left traces on the ground."[59] Instead, a scholar is obligated to use texts as pragmatic interpretants, which actively force together sign and object according to the rules which order our current regime of truth. The breadth of a scholar's erudition and the vividness of his imagination are two equal factors simultaneously governing thick description.

Schopen laments that an acceptance of the value of literary texts such as that prescribed here has already resulted in a sad history for the field of Buddhist Studies, developing a picture of Indian Buddhism that "may reflect more our own . . . history and values than the history and values of Indian Buddhism."[60] A response to this accusation is found in Ricoeur's understanding of hermeneutic "appropriation," the process whereby texts become meaningful to readers. Interpretation, for Ricoeur, involves the appropriation "*here and now* [of] the intention of the text;"[61] this "intention" is an *orient* en route towards which a reader places himself through acts of interpretation.[62] This surely is Schopen's program in his Archaeology. However, we have also seen that, because Schopen over-values archaeological materials and adopts a strong operational imperative, he finds only very circumscribed intentions and very short *en routes*. That is to say, for Ricouer texts

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[58] Clifford Geertz. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. (New York: Harper, 1973): 7.

[59] Schopen. "Burial '*Ad Sanctos*,'" 193.

[60] Schopen. "Archaeology and Protestant Presuppositions," 23. Caroline Walker Bynum has made a similar critique against "presentism" in the field of Medieval History. See Kathleen Biddick ("Genders, Bodies, Borders: Technologies of the Visible," *Speculum*. 68 [1993]: 396) for a cogent assessment of Bynum's argument.

[61] Paul Ricoeur. *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*. Ed. and trans. by John B. Thompson. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981): 161.

[62] Ricoeur. *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 162.

have a vast range of possible significances; appropriation is the acceptance of one (or more) of those significances as presently meaningful. Schopen, by contrast, expects that texts have a very circumscribed range of possible significances; appropriation is the acceptance of one (or more) of those significances based upon what the text itself identifies as meaningful.

Given this presentation of Ricouer's and Schopen's understandings of textual interpretation, one can see why Schopen views the traditional use of texts within Buddhist studies as overly self-involved. But, let's face it, ancient Indian Buddhism has no intrinsic significance in our culture or society: the value of reading Ajaṇṭā's remains lies in the fact that appropriation "*gives* the [reading] subject new capacities for knowing himself."[63] Viewed in meta-disciplinary terms, Schopen is an ideal reader, for by appropriating Indian Buddhist sources he has come to know his own scholarly self. Accordingly, Schopen's disparagement of the prior history of Indian Buddhist scholarship is testimony to a shifting of the *here and now* into which the intentions of Buddhist texts are appropriated. As Karl Popper writes, "knowledge is positive *only* in so far as certain theories are, at a certain moment of time, preferred to others."[64] In reading Schopen's reading of his scholarly tradition, we find that the local features of this field's conceptual space have changed; the mapping relationship between the real-world and theory structure has shifted. But we must also recognize that the features and rules governing interpretation *here and now* are no less a reflection of readers' own histories and values than those that came before.

In sum, my use of archaeological and textual sources diverges from Schopen's programme in that my project joyfully exceeds the limits of positive knowledge. In the

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[63] Ricoeur. *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 192.

[64] Karl Popper. *Objective Knowledge*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972): 20.

choice "between absolute knowledge and hermeneutics"[65] my sympathies are clear. For if absolute knowledge is first a quality of a conceptual space who rules are imposed from without, then, as Geertz concludes in his study of Negara, the Balinese theater-state: "The real is as imagined as the imaginary."[66] Nevertheless, as a scientific model is only valuable insofar as it can be brought to bear upon the explanation of a natural phenomenon, so this hermeneutic model gains meaning insofar as it is brought to bear upon the interpretation of social phenomena, in this case the Ajaṇṭā caves. The preceding subsection was an extended meditation upon what one might expect to gain through such a process of interpretation.

Two Scholars Between a Rock and a Hard Place

As the adequate source for statements of normative Buddhism, texts provide evidence necessary for recapturing the ideological dimension of the rituals that produced our archaeological and art historical data. The publications of early visitors like James Bird and Colonel Alexander are clear documentation of misinterpretations occasioned by a lack of adequate textual information. The great leap forward witnessed in Ajaṇṭā studies when Fergusson and Burgess combined categories derived from the appropriate texts with archaeological investigation is indisputable testimony to the value of literary materials for establishing a general semantic field within which an analysis of Ajaṇṭā's Buddhism might take place. The above examination of Schopen's Archaeology was directed to just that point. Yet, although texts may be necessary, Schopen has nevertheless settled beyond

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[65] Ricoeur. *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 193.

[66] Clifford Geertz. *Negara: The Theater State in Nineteenth-Century Bali.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980): 136.

doubt they are *not sufficient* for establishing a semantic field that can circumscribe analysis of Buddhism as-it-was on the ground. All potential textual materials are not *prima facie* valuable, nor may their testimony in every case guide the interpretation of the site's artifacts. Both the reasoned choice and appropriate application of textual sources are fundamental underpinnings of this project's success.

Accordingly, before I enumerate the textual sources to be used in the following excavation of Ajaṇṭā's Buddhist matrix, it will be valuable to look at two instances in which a scholar clearly transgresses methodological bounds in his or her use of texts. The first example comes from Dieter Schlingloff's analysis of Cave 17's Wheel of Existence (*bhavacakra*); the second from Sheila Weiner's discussion of Cave 16's main Buddha image. In the first we find that Schlingloff disregards physical evidence from the caves that would to contradict an iconography established in texts; in the second, we find naive Buddhist studies, for Weiner uses Buddhist doctrines without investigating their position within or implications for Buddhist intellectual history, and she uses texts without adequately establishing how those chosen in particular are applicable to Ajaṇṭā in particular.

Schlingloff was probably the first scholar of Buddhism proper to undertake an extended consideration of Ajaṇṭā. A significant share of his prior work having been devoted to the study of Buddhist Sanskrit texts, Schlingloff's broad knowledge of this literature has been of particular value in the success of his project to identify precise textual precedents for Ajaṇṭā's site's narrative paintings. Unfortunately, Schlingloff's zeal in reading the archaeological evidence through the textual can serve as an object lesson in how not to use texts in the study of Ajaṇṭā. Let us look, in particular, at his discussion of the 'Wheel of Existence' on the left porch wall of Cave 17.[67] As one can see from the accompanying photo (Fig. 20), it appears that the wheel could not have been a complete

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[67] Dieter Schlingloff. *Studies in the Ajanta Paintings: Identifications and Interpretations.* (Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1988): 167-174.

circle, for its lower right quadrant would have been interrupted by the porch's side-door. Further, even were the door not an impediment, according to the available textual sources concerning the *bhavacakra* -- the *Divyāvadāna* and the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya* -- these icons should include five or six realms of rebirth and twelve links of co-dependent origination, whereas it appears that a complete Wheel at Ajaṇṭā would have required the illustration of eight realms and sixteen or seventeen links. Indeed, Fergusson and Burgess alike unwittingly contravened the textual paradigms in their reports: Fergusson in 1845 claimed that Ajaṇṭā's wheel was divided into eight, and Burgess in 1889 testified to seeing an eight-part Wheel at the Kanheri caves near Bombay. Schlingloff rejects Fergusson's account out of hand, and belittles Burgess's as being "a supposed analogy with the Ajanta wheel."[68] Instead, to solve this dilemma, and account for the inconvenient door, Schlingloff suggests that the painter "left a sector of the wheel open, which make [*sic*] it look as if two compartments had been cut through the middle and pushed back to make room for the door. The reason for leaving a relatively large sector above the door vacant, was to accommodate the ornamentation around the door frame (which no longer survives but probably resembled that of other doors) as well as the feet of the monster clasping the wheel (which likewise no longer survive). As a consequence, our wheel contained no more than the customary six compartments and twelve links"[69] (Fig. 21).

Schlingloff's is no doubt an ingenious solution. Unfortunately it does not tally with the archaeological evidence present *in situ*. In proposing this clarification, Schlingloff rejects an observation made by Mr. Gresley (one of the site's earliest Western visitors), to the effect that the top of the doorway was covered to allow the circle's completion. Indeed, Fig. 22 shows very clearly that plugs *were* cut into the door frame near its top to

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[68] Schlingloff. *Studies in the Ajanta Paintings,* 172.

[69] Schlingloff. *Studies in the Ajanta Paintings*, 169.

hold a piece of wood. If not for this reason, then why the plugs? On Caves 16 and 17 alike, the side doors on the porches' rear-walls were cut very large at first -- probably to allow maximum light into the caves during excavation -- and subsequently were partially blocked in order to provide additional surface for painting on the porches. Like the door on the Wheel of Life's wall, these side-doors on Cave 16 and 17's rear walls also have plugs for anchoring the cover. Further, app. A, No. 81, from Cave 17 makes this practice abundantly clear. As it exists today, this record reads *śrī*, "Mister;" an epithet that, in Sanskrit as in English, is followed by a man's name. This *śrī* is found directly to the left of the porch's rear wall's left side doorway. Were this record longer (as it would have been), the only place the additional *akṣaras* could have been placed was over what is now the doorway's empty space, but was then a plastered surface. Most significantly, on the Wheel of Existence wall, a small area of painting remains over the door's top right corner. This is visible on Fig. 22, although it was not represented in Schlingloff's line-drawing. This patch has the same color as the background used in the compartments of the Wheel's co-dependent origination links, and is in the correct arc to have fit within that circle! This would suggest that the Wheel's rim continued up to and over what is now the top of the doorway. Finally, the angles and layout of the Wheel as reconstructed in Schlingloff's text make no sense as part of an overall composition on the wall. Fig. 20 shows that, if the door had any border at all, it was very narrow; only a small area is left on the right side, and typically at Ajaṇṭā borders are symmetrical all around.

The extant evidence does not reveal whether eight realms or sixteen limbs of dependent origination were indeed depicted on Cave 17's porch. It does tell us that the textual materials at our disposal are not sufficient for fully reconstructing this element of Cave 17's iconographic programme. Regarding a *jātaka* portrayed inside this cave, Schlingloff criticizes Yazdani's identifications, writing: "YAZDANI's description exemplifies

the fact that it is impossible to give an adequate account of even minor details without having identified the literary text on which they are based."[70] We see here that, when one rejects the evidence presented by the caves themselves in favor of texts, a strength can become a weakness.

Schlingloff had the opportunity to set the study of Ajaṇṭā's Buddhist dimension on a credible footing. Although his textual identifications are usually very helpful, we have just seen he gives too great an authority to these sources. Observations such as "Nāgas and Yakṣas . . . were painted in Buddhist monasteries to satisfy the needs of Buddhist laymen who visited the monasteries on festival days" and "Buddhist artworks financed by laymen and executed by lay artists were primarily intended to help and guide the monks on their path toward salvation"[71] further show that Schlingloff's understanding of Ajaṇṭā is largely built upon pious fictions that have less to do with the historical Ajaṇṭā as it was than with his desire to find in Ajaṇṭā his own ideal Indian Buddhist community. In a recent publication, Geri Malandra makes a methodological critique which would place Schlingloff in the mainstream of Indian art-historical scholarship: "Among South Asian art historians, a tendency persists to seek a formal literary text to 'prove' the meaning of what we observe in sculpture or architecture."[72]

Nevertheless, at least Schlingloff is sensitive to the histories and affiliations of the texts he uses. Art historians' studies of Buddhism at Ajaṇṭā have also by and large been founded upon facile stereotypes, but they have the added problem of evincing little sensitivity to the categories through which Buddhism is formally studied and less awareness yet of the methodological, evidential, and conceptual problematics that engage this religion's

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[70] Schlingloff. *Studies in the Ajanta Paintings,* 113.

[71] Schlingloff. *Studies in the Ajanta Paintings,* 177.

[72] Geri H. Malandra. *Unfolding a Maṇḍala: The Buddhist Cave Temples at Ellora.* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993): xviii.

students in the modern academy. Perhaps the work of scholarship that best exemplifies the complications encountered by an art-historian writing about Ajaṇṭā's Buddhism is Sheila Weiner's *Ajaṇṭā: Its Place in Buddhist Art*. Weiner characterizes Ajaṇṭā as "a kind of document which visually traces the development of Buddhist thought,"[73] and states one of her aims as being "to throw some light upon the development of Buddhism itself as reflected in its monuments and art."[74] Although Weiner begs the question when she unquestioningly accepts Fergusson and Burgess's tenet that this "development" is adequately encapsulated under the rubric of a shift from the Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna, such an assumption is almost universal in the literature on Ajaṇṭā and need not disturb us here. Rather, Weiner's monograph is instructive for her use of Buddhist textual sources and concepts derived from those texts: she shows us how *not* to use such evidence in the study of Ajaṇṭā.

Let us attend to a single emblematic moment of Weiner's text, in which she attempts to explain the significance of the central image in Cave 16 (Fig. 23), perhaps the first monolithic *pralaṃbapādāsana* Buddha excavated in Western India. Weiner posits this icon as the quintessential *Mahāyāna* cult figure at Ajaṇṭā, for in her view, "the *Mahāyāna* threshold" is crossed when there is evidence for "a striving toward, if not actual visual expression of, the concepts inherent in the evolution of the *trikāya* doctrine as they appear particularly in the *Ratnagotravibhāgamahāyānottaratantra* Ś*āstra* [(RGV)] and the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*."[75] Simply put, this statement is a muddle. But I wish to point out two

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[73] Shiela L. Weiner. *Ajaṇṭā: Its Place in Buddhist Art.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977): 3.

[74] Weiner. *Ajaṇṭā,* 4.

[75] Weiner. *Ajaṇṭā,* 66.

problems in particular. First, why is the *trikāya the* characteristic Mahāyāna doctrine?[76] Second, why are the two texts here named *particularly* preferred representations of that doctrine?

Weiner justifies her imputation of a connection between the Cave 16 icon and the *trikāya* doctrine with the observation that the iconography and physical presentation of this image within the cave suggest "a manifestation or hypostasis of different Buddha principles than [the images in other Ajaṇṭā shrines]."[77] She uses the *trikāya* doctrine to explain the "increas[ed] emphasis placed upon the Buddha as the principle among the *triratna*, or three jewels,"[78] which she sees embodied in this image. Surely this is the single most majestic Buddha at the site, and scholars of Buddhism, such as Akira Hirakawa,[79] have indeed posited the move from Hīnayāna to Mahāyāna as a movement from a Saṅgha-

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[76] The *trikāya* doctrine, the doctrine of the Buddha's three bodies is a Buddhology (akin to a Christology) which analyzes and explains the multimodal nature of this religion's sacred Source. In a basic formulation these three bodies are: 1) an immaterial *dharmakāya*, unconditioned, permanent, essential Buddhahood in and for itself; and two material bodies: 2) the *saṃbhogakāya*, the body in which an individual Buddha enjoys the bliss of Buddhahood; 3) the *nirmāṇakāya*, a body which a Buddha manifests and sends to places like Earth to preach and convert. Although a three-body theory became the standard Mahāyānist formulation, there are two, four, and five body schemes as well. The best introduction to this Buddhology is Gadjin Nagao's "On the Theory of Buddha Body (*Buddha-kāya*)" in the collection of his essays *Mādhyamika and Yogācara*. (Ed. by Leslie Kawamura. [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991]: 103-22). Suffice it at present to point out that Weiner could consider herself in good company in her assumption that the *trikāya* dogma has explanatory value for Ajaṇṭā, as one of the seminal voices of Indian Art History, Benjamin Rowland, speaks of this concept as finding its "inevitable reflexion in the iconography of [Buddhist] art" (*The Art and Architecture of India: Buddhist, Hindu, Jain*. [Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1971]: 33). Nevertheless, Lewis Lancaster offers a thoughtful and important caution against the too-free use of this dogma in the study of Buddhist iconography ("An Early Mahāyāna Sermon About the Body of the Buddha and the Making of Images," *Artibus Asiae*. 36 [1974]: 287-291). Lancaster's criticisms may be apropos to Weiner's overall project and to Ajaṇṭā, but because the site certainly post-dates preliminary scholastic formulations of the *trikāya*, it is also possible that Ajaṇṭā's community was familiar with this idea. Be this as it may, right now my interest is not in the presence of this doctrine at Ajaṇṭā, but rather in Weiner's choice and use of textual sources to explain Ajaṇṭā's icons under the *trikāya* rubric.

[77] Weiner. *Ajaṇṭā,* 68-9.

[78] Weiner. *Ajaṇṭā,* 116.

[79] Akira Hirakawa. "The Rise of Mahāyāna Buddhism and its Relationship to the Worship of Stūpas," *Memoires of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko*. 22 (1963): 57-106.

oriented religiosity to one that is Buddha-oriented. Nevertheless, within the Mahāyāna sūtra literature there is perhaps even stronger testimony to a devaluing of Buddha and Saṅgha alike, in favor of the Dharma, manifest in the widespread Cult of the Book.[80] Or, even if one were to acknowledge an aggrandizement of Buddha as a primary characteristic of Mahāyāna, important sources exist within the Mahāyāna that emphasize the Buddha without positing a formal Buddhology framed in terms of body numbers or types.[81]

Setting aside Weiner's invocation of the *trikāya* doctrine, it is manifestly unclear why she cited the RGV and *Laṅkāvatāra* as the "particularly" privileged sources for its presentation. Her grasp of these sources is tenuous at best: at one point Weiner says that "the distinctions formulated in the *Laṅkā* . . . are more fully elaborated upon in the *Ratna.*," but in the very next paragraph she claims that "the *Laṅka* . . . draw[s] upon the *Ratna.* and [is] in some respects more fully developed."[82] This is confusing, but no more so than when Weiner remarks that the RGV was crucial to the development of Mahāyānist Yogācāra school of philosophy, and that the *ekayāna* theory found in this text is "one of the basic characteristics of *Mahāyāna* Buddhism."[83] However, not only is the RGV *not*

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[80] Cf. Gregory Schopen. "The Phrase '*sa pṛthivīpradeśaś caityabhūto bhavet*' in the *Vajracchedikā*: Notes on the Cult of the Book in Mahāyāna," *Indo-Iranian Journal.* 17 (1975): 147-181.

[81] To name just two highlights: the *Lotus Sūtra*, perhaps the most popular statement of a Mahāyānist Buddhology, never represents the Buddha in terms of *bodies*, though later scholastics in India and China interpreted the text along such lines. On this point see Terry Rae Abbott. *Vasubandhu's Commentary to the 'Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra': A Study of its History and Significance*. (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1986) and Young-ho Kim. *Tao-Sheng's Commentary on the Lotus Sutra: A Study and Translation*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990). Similarly the *Sukhāvatīvyūha sūtras* aggrandize Buddhas and Buddhahood without taking recourse to the *trikāya*, albeit in China this analysis was used extensively in its exegesis (cf. David W. Chappell. "Chinese Buddhist Interpretations of the Pure Lands." In *Buddhist and Taoist Studies I*. Ed. by D. Chappell and M. Saso. [Honolulu: Universtiy of Hawii Press, 1977]: 23-53).

[82] Weiner. *Ajaṇṭā,* 67.

[83] Weiner. *Ajaṇṭā,* 68.

associated with either the Madhyamaka or Yogācāra school in particular,[84] one hallmark of the Yogācāra is that it does not accept the *ekayāna* doctrine![85] In fact, according to a recently published introduction to the Mahāyāna, "the *Ratnagotravibhāga* and its commentary seem to have exerted no obvious or direct influence on the development of Indian Buddhist philosophical thought prior to the eleventh century."[86] The *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, by contrast, is cited in both Nāgārjuna's *Sūtrasamuccaya*,[87]and Śāntideva's Ś*ikṣa-samuccaya*,[88] the latter for its vociferous condemnation of the carnivore's sin, not its Buddhology. Anyone with a passing familiarity of Buddhist intellectual history must wonder why widely read texts for the developed *trikāya* doctrine, such as the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* and *Mahāyānasaṃgraha*, were not mentioned.

Weiner never draws a convincing link between this Mahāyānist doctrine and the Ajaṇṭā caves, nor between the caves and the texts she identifies as containing that doctrine, because the sub-text of her argument is a simple lack of methodological rigor: Weiner treats her sources as if the Mahāyāna was a single, coherent, unilinear doctrinal

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[84] Cf. David Seyfort Ruegg. *La Théorie du Tathāgatagarbha et du Gotra: Études sur la Sotériologie et la Gnoséologie du Bouddhisme.* Publications de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient. volume LXX. Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1969): 57f. and Paul Williams. *Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations.* (New York: Routledge, 1989): 96.

[85]This statement is not quite correct. Abbott's study of Vasubandhu's commentary to the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra* reveals that Yogācāra philosophers did have to come to terms with this doctrine. However, in this *śāstra*, Vasubandhu does not adopt the universalist interpretation of the *ekayāna* doctrine suggested in most readings of the *Lotus* or Ś*rīmālādevīsiṃhanāda sūtra.* Instead, Vasubandhu utilizes the *Yogācārabhūmi*'s analysis of Śrāvakas into four types, enabling him to present some Śrāvakas as able to attain Buddhahood, and others not. In point of fact, as I shall discuss below in my chapter on *Dharma,* it is quite likely that the doctrine, presented in many Yogācāra texts, that beings have specific *gotras* -- "genetic" capacities for spiritual attainment, which enable some to become Buddhas and others only arhats -- was an important factor in the self-conception of Ajaṇṭā's community.

[86] Williams. *Mahāyāna Buddhism*, 96.

[87] Christian Lindtner. *Nagarjuniana: Studies in the Writings and Philosophy of Nāgārjuna.* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987): 176.

[88] Cecil Bendall and William Henry Denham Rouse (trans). *Sikṣā-Samuccaya; A Compendium of Buddhist Doctrine, Compiled by* Ś*āntideva, Chiefly from Earlier Mahāyāna Sūtras.* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1971): 323.

tradition, and she treats Ajaṇṭā as if its inhabitants were in a synchronic harmony with all the other Mahāyānists of their own and every other day. To finish, Weiner is so little conversant with the fundaments of Buddhist and Buddhological discourse that she opines that the following coincidences "seem other than accidental:"[89] Cave 16 was dedicated to the Three Jewels and the RGV is an extended analysis of these same Three Jewels; the *Laṅkāvatāra* contains a discussion of the term "Sugata," a common epithet of the Buddha, and Cave 16's dedicatory inscription uses this epithet; the Cave 16 inscription has a benediction that the whole world may enter nirvāṇa, and the *Laṅkāvatāra* an entreaty that those who read the *sūtra* retire to forest retreats to study the doctrine. One need not read very long in Buddhist literature before the Three Jewels, the term "Sugata," or praises for nirvāṇa and the homeless life are encountered. As Weiner claims, *it is other than accidental*: the texts Weiner cites and the Ajaṇṭā caves both glean from the same domain of Buddhist terminology and doctrine. Let us now set forth, the materials this study may appropriately harvest from that field.

The Ajaṇṭā Canon

This sub-section, the final of my prolegomena, presents the specific textual materials this dissertation's second half will utilize for studying Ajaṇṭā's Buddhism. Schopen's exhortation that an Archaeology of Religions should rely upon "only those [texts] that could be shown to have been actually known or read at a given time, or to have governed or shaped the kind of religious behavior that had left traces on the ground"[90] provides a valuable basis for compiling this list of sources. The previous examination of this Archaeology showed, however, that whereas the first half of this stipulation is

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[89] Weiner. *Ajaṇṭā,* 74.

[90] Schopen. Burial '*Ad Sanctos,*'" 193.

workable (it is conceivable to privilege specific texts that can be shown to have been used at the site), the second half brooks two interpretations, one overtly exclusive, the other overtly inclusive.

The use of texts will be exclusive if the wording "governed or shaped the kind of religious behavior that had left traces on the ground" means that to discuss a Buddha image, for instance, one may use the specific statements about Buddha images or their rituals contained in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, for instance, but one may not similarly apply to the image Buddhologies or philosophical categories found elsewhere in that same text. Schopen's wording could be taken as inclusive when read in the light of the previous section's argument that ritual (the context in which most significant traces-on-the-ground were produced) is performed as a means of mediating the ideological gap between the socially real and socially ideal. In the scholar's attempt to recover the striving-towards-which of an ancient ritual, all spatially and temporally viable nomological statements are useful *in potentia*. One must remember, however, that Schopen strategically shifts the focus from the *sources* used for recovering Buddhism to this religion's conceptual *location*.

To reiterate, scholars in the field have traditionally sought Buddhism in its doctrines; Schopen searches for Buddhism in "what religious people actually did."[91] Although I follow Schopen to this place, I must then dis-place that which I find, for I consider the "why" -- the ideological tension -- to be part of the "what." Thus, whereas Schopen tends towards exclusivity and the strong operational imperative, as one already knows I shall err on the side of inclusion. The remainder of this chapter will attempt to set forth the texts I would include within a 'canon' of literature for the recovery of Ajaṇṭā's Buddhism. Not every one of these sources will find its way into the dissertation's second

[91] Schopen. "Burial '*Ad Sanctos*,'" 193.

half, which investigates the complex culture of Buddhism at the Ajaṇṭā caves.

The basic sources for recovering Ajaṇṭā's Buddhism are the numerous epigraphs present at Ajaṇṭā and Ghaṭotkaca (included in this study because it was commissioned by Cave 16's Varāhadeva). Between them, these two sites boast a total of 99 records, painted and incised. Of these, six derive from a period of activity spanning the first centuries B.C.E to C.E. The remaining inscriptions may be subdivided further into two broad temporal groups, the Vākāṭaka and Rāṣṭrakūṭa.[92] The inscriptions from the Vākāṭaka period run the gamut from simple identifications of donors, to variously elaborate formulae describing donors, their gifts, and their motivations for giving; to labels that identify the figures in narrative paintings; to didactic verses from a popular literary text, Ārya Śūra's *Jātakamālā*; to the verse inscriptions from Caves 16 and 17 that were so instrumental in the reconstruction of Ajaṇṭā's history. Based upon the previous chapter's reconstructed history, Vākāṭaka period records may be broadly analyzed into two divisions: the programmatic and the intrusive. The importance of this dichotomy lies in its ability to segregate the strata of donative activities, synchronically across the entire site and diachronically within a single cave. Lacking this periodization, we would possess no clear vision of the patterns of patronage at Ajaṇṭā.

I need not discuss here the specific content of Ajaṇṭā's inscriptions, as that material will provide the many *points d'appui* for my elaboration of Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha in the chapters to follow. However, precisely because I do value these sources so, it is

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[92] A group of six epigraphic records (app. A, Nos. 80, 81, 82, 85, 97, 99) may be dated to the late seventh to early eighth centuries (approximately), when, according to Geri Malandra, the Rāṣṭrakūṭa dynasty governed the territory surrounding Ajaṇṭā ("The Date of the Ajaṇṭā Cave 27 Inscription," *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Sudasiens.* 26 [1982]: 37-46). Except for No. 99, these post-Vākāṭaka inscriptions have no specifically Buddhist content; nor do they signal new dedications or donations. Rather, these records seem mostly to be simple graffiti, recording the names and titles of latter-day visitors to the caves. A single exception is a notoriously damaged paean to the Rāṣṭrakūṭa family, located on the wall connecting Cave 26 and Cave 26 Lower Left. None of these later epigraphic records give grounds for inferring that the caves were still functioning as Buddhist vihāras at the time of their writing.

worth addressing the evidential nature of epigraphic data, albeit in an abbreviated manner. We have already seen Schopen characterize inscriptions as one of the Archaeology of Religions' three primary source materials (the others being religious constructions and architectures, and art-historical remains). Epigraphs are thus privileged because they are generally localizable in space and time, largely unedited, and not meant to be circulated.[93] In short, they are sources indisputably tied to their locales. This is a fair enough presentation, which simply means that Ajaṇṭā's own epigraphs provide the most secure basis from which to address the doctrinal positions and ideological tensions within Buddhism at Ajaṇṭā. Nevertheless, we have also seen that however local such records may be, they are always already implicated within a textual web reaching well beyond the local community. This point is clear in regard to three of the four types of Ajaṇṭā's Vākāṭaka-period inscriptions: *labels* are placed on painted figures so people can know who they are and recollect to themselves or tell others the figures' stories; the *didactic verses* come from known texts, their referentiality goes without saying; the *long inscriptions* on Caves 16, 17, 26, and Ghaṭotkaca are literate and well-conceived celebrations in verse of these caves donors, there can be no question of *not* treating these as literary texts.[94]

But what of the bulk of Ajaṇṭā's records, the formulaic donative inscriptions? As noted, these vary from the naming of a donor, or even the mere deixis of one, to providing information about a donor's secular or monastic status, his family, and his purpose in making the donation. Though such information is historically useful to us, with this particular species of evidence it is not quite clear that the cognitive or discursive dimension was where its native import lay. The possibility that these inscriptions had functions other than to provide public information about donors is highlighted by

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[93] Schopen. "Archaeology and Protestant Presuppositions," 1-3.

[94] Cf. Shri Ram Goyal. *A History of the Imperial Guptas*. (Allahabad: Central Book Depot, 1967): 7, and Ronald Inden. *Imagining India*. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990): 232.

Schopen's observation of the "curious fact" that throughout Buddhist India many inscriptions were placed out of view -- underneath, behind, or atop the inscribed object -- such that they could neither be seen, nor read.[95] At Ajaṇṭā too, numerous records in Caves 9 and 10 are placed well beyond the vision of a causal observer on the ground. Moreover (though argumentation from evidentiary lack is suspect), despite all the losses of painting over the centuries it is evident that some donors *chose* to inscribe their images and some *chose* not to do so. It may be that the discursive element in these formulaic donative records was less important than the bare fact of their creation: the medium, rather than the message, was the message.

The inclusion of a dedicatory record with a donation may have been a religious practice with integral liturgical significance (*not* primarily a means of communicating social information), whose canonical implications Ajaṇṭā's Buddhists were able to choose personally to accept or ignore. As a liturgical pericope, these formulaic donative inscriptions all provide both indexical and canonical information: the former entails personal information about the donor, and is transmitted in the ever-variable aspects of these records; the latter is contained in the liturgy's invariant aspects, which are not encoded by the performers themselves. Accordingly, however local any individual donative inscription may be, the illocutionary force of an epigraph's mere materialization is *generic*; it is not self-referential either to the record itself or the individual donor. As I noted above, through this material one can learn what Ajaṇṭā's Buddhists accepted, not what they believed. This requires, in turn, that one not treat epigraphic records as privileged sources of on-the-ground religiosity, but as distinctly contextualized, highly formalized, strictly conventionalized redactions, even privately public distillations of specific ideals and ideas also found in the literary record.

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[95] Schopen. "Archaeology and Protestant Presuppositions," 2.

Turning to that literature, much of the prior research on Ajaṇṭā has been concerned to locate precedents for the narratives painted on the caves' walls. The only text that can be indisputably shown to have been read at Ajaṇṭā is the *Jātakamālā* of Ārya Śūra:[96] verses 4, 15, 19, and 56 from the Kṣāntivādi Jātaka and verse 44 from the Maitrībala Jātaka of this author's collection are to be found in Cave 2's porch left-side cell (app. A. Nos. 5, 6, 8). As a source for reconstructing Ajaṇṭā's material history, the *Jātakamālā* is not particularly useful. Little is known of this text's author. The Tibetan historian Tāranātha claims that Śūra was an alternate name for the poet Mātṛceṭa,[97] who is thought to have been King Kaniṣka's contemporary.[98] But this identification is likely just one of the many conflations of distinct individuals found in Tāranātha's text. In any event, a terminus is available, for the poet Haribhaṭṭa cites Ācārya Śūra as providing the inspiration and model for his own *Jātakamālā* collection. Hahn has attempted to show that the *Hsien-yü-ching*, translated into Chinese in 455, cites a passage from Haribhaṭṭa's *Prabhāsajātaka*, thereby setting an upper limit for Ārya Śūra to the late fourth century.[99]

A more interesting piece of information, albeit not terribly reliable, is that the only extant Sanskrit commentary on the *Jātakamālā,* the *Jātakamālāṭīkā*, assigned to

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[96] Hendrik Kern (ed). *The Jātaka-mālā: Stories of Buddha's Former Incarnations, Otherwise Entitled Bodhsattva-avadāna-mālā, by Ārya-śūra*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1891); Jacob Samuel Speyer (trans). *The Jātakamālā: Garland of Birth-stories of Āryaśūra*. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1971); Peter Khoroche. *Towards a New Edition of Ārya-Śūra's Jātakamālā*. (Bonn: Indica et Tibetica Verlag, 1987); Peter Khoroche (trans). *Once the Buddha was a Monkey: Ārya Śūra's Jātakamālā*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

[97] Tāranātha. *Tāranātha's History of Buddhism in India*. Ed. and trans. by Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1990): 131-2.

[98] F. W. Thomas. "The Works of Āryaśūra, Triratnadāsa, and Dhārmika-Subhūti." In *Album Kern*. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1903): 405-408.

[99] Carol Meadows. *Ārya-Śūra's Compendium of the Perfections: Text, Translation and Analysis of the Pāramitāsamāsa*. (Bonn: Indica et Tibetica Verlag, 1986): 4.

somewhere between the seventh and fourteenth centuries.[100] The introduction to this commentary reads:

> Formerly, Reverend Teacher Śūra was the son of the supreme lord of the South. Though he came next in line [for the throne, Śūra] foreswore the kingdom. A renunciate, he was established on the path to Awakening, and abided on the first [bodhisattva] stage. . . . While wandering, he wrote the *Jātakamālā* on *tamāla* leaves using a thorn.[101]

One can of course fantasize that this Deccan king was a Vākāṭaka, even a Vatsagulma; thereby explaining why the front aisle of Cave 16's vihāra, commissioned by the Hariṣeṇa's faithful minister, was covered by representations of the *Jātakamālā's* 34 stories.[102] Ārya Śūra's potential association with this Vākāṭaka branch is suggested by the tenth century author Ratnaśrījñāna citing the *Jātakamālā* as an epitome of Vidarbha style, *Vaidarbhī rīti*;[103] this style is also found under the name *vātsagulmī*, after the city of Vatsagulma.[104] Apropos to the previous chapter's investigation of Vidarbha, Vatsagulma, and Aśmaka, the fourth or fifth century Buddhist literary critic Bhāmaha put forth the now-lost *Aśmakavaṃśa* ("History of Aśmaka") as a leading example of this style named alternately after Vidarbha and Vatsagulma.[105] This evidence cannot be relied upon too strongly, however, for the naming of this style after Vidarbha or Vatsagulma quickly became metonymic for that geographic region which included Vidarbha, Vatsagulma, and Aśmaka all. Even Daṇḍin, who lived in Kāñcīpura in the far South, was a staunch champion and

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[100] Peter Khoroche. "Jātakamālāṭīkā," *South Asian Studies* (Journal for the Society of South Asian Studies, British Academy, London). 1 (1985): 63.

[101] *tatra bhadantācāryyasūraḥ p<u>rā dākṣiṇātyabhūpatisūtaḥ kramād āgatam api rājyaṃ parityajya pravrajito bodhimārgaprasthitaḥ prathamabhūmisthito . . . caṃkramyamāṇas tamālapatreṣu kaṃtakalikhitākṣarāṃ jātakamālāṃ cakāra* Khoroche. "Jātakamālāṭīkā," 63.

[102] Schlingloff. *Studies in the Ajanta Paintings,* 143-156.

[103] Khoroche. *Once the Buddha Was a Monkey*, xvi.

[104] Anthony Kennedy Warder. *Indian Kāvya Literature.* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1972): vol. 3, 59.

[105] Warder. *Indian Kāvya Literature*, vol. 1, 93.

accomplished practitioner of *Vaidarbhī/Vātsagulmī* style.

Doctrinally, Ārya Śūra's text seems to have no polemic vis-à-vis the Hīnayāna/Mahāyāna division or in terms of the various school and *nikāya* separations. Once he does mention the *yānavara*, "the best vehicle," which both Meadows[106] and Khoroche[107] take to mean the Mahāyāna in particular. In context, however, *yānavara* could as readily describe the Buddha's religion, rather than a division therein. Instead, the *Jātakamāla* is notable for its concern to address the issue of kingship from a staunchly Buddhist perspective, and especially to denigrate the *real politik* of Kauṭilīya as an mode of governance inferior to policy based upon righteous Dharma:[108] an understandable preoccupation for a crown-prince who had renounced the throne to become a wandering mendicant.

In addition to Śūra's *Jātakamālā*, it is possible that a great many more texts were familiar to the planners of Ajaṇṭā's artistic programmes. Lalou[109] and Schlingloff[110] have sought to identify specific textual precedents for most of Ajaṇṭā's narrative paintings. The methodology underlying their scholarship is plain enough: they analyze tales into their distinct narrative elements, compare those elements with known texts, and voilà. For instance, the front of the pillar-capitals on the right side of Cave 1's porch depict highlights from the Buddha's life, the rightmost pillar portraying the bodhisattva being given the

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[106] Meadows. *Ārya-Śūra's Compendium of the Perfections,* 12.

[107] Khoroche. *Once the Buddhas Was a Monkey*, 257, n. 1.8.

[108] Meadows. *Ārya-Śūra's Compendium of the Perfections,* 9ff.; Khoroche. *Once the Buddha Was a Monkey*, 259, n. 6.2.

[109] Marcelle Lalou. "Trois Récits du Dulva reconnus dans les peintures d'Ajaṇṭā," *Journal Asiatique.* 207 (1925): 333-37.

[110] Schlingloff. *Studies in the Ajanta Paintings.*

bowl of milk-rice after his repudiation of harsh asceticism (Fig. 24). In the *Mahāvastu*,[111] *Lalitavistara*,[112] and *Nidānakathā*,[113] the food is offered by a single girl named Sujātā; in the *Buddhacarita* she is called Nandabalā;[114] the *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya*[115] and the *Divyāvadāna*[116] mention two sisters as the donors, Nandā and Nandabalā; in the *Abhiniṣkramaṇasūtra*[117] two girls are mentioned, but only one, Sujātā, offers the bodhisattva milk-rice, and contrary to all the other versions, she presents it at the threshold of her house rather than while the bodhisattva is seated beneath a tree. On Cave 1's pillar, two female figures are clearly visible, as is a seated bodhisattva, suggesting either the MSV or *Divyāvadāna* for this depiction's precedent. One can resolve the matter by the fact that besides the two women, the scene also has two men, an ascetic and a god: the MSV alone records that, before Nandā and Nandabalā provided the milk-rice to the bodhisattva, an ascetic named Upaga requested it, and it was offered to the gods but they declined to accept. Strong evidence, to be sure, that the sculptor, or monk who taught the sculptor the story (this point is in need of clarification), was familiar with the *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya.*

Following this line of reasoning, the MSV was not only used by those responsible

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[111] J. J. Jones (trans). *The Mahāvastu*. (London: Pāli Text Society, 1987), vol. 2, 195.

[112] Parasurama Lakshmana Vaidya (ed). *Lalitavistara*. (Darbhanga: Mithila Insitute of Post-Graduate Studies and Research in Sanskrit Learning, 1987): 220.

[113] T. W. Rhys Davids. *Buddhist Birth-Stories (Jataka Tales); The Commentatorial Introduction Entitled Nidāna-Kathā, The Story of the Lineage*. (Varanasi: Indological Book House, 1973): 184-6.

[114] Aśvaghoṣa. *Aśvaghoṣa's Buddhacarita, or, Acts of the Buddha, in three parts*. Ed. and trans. by E. H. Johnston. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984): vol, 1, 142; vol. 2. 185.

[115] Raniero Gnoli (ed). *The Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabhedavastu, Being the 17th and last Section of the Vinaya of the Mūlasarvāstivādin*. (Rome: Instituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1977): vol. 1, 108-11.

[116] Edward Byles Cowell and R. A. Neil (eds). *The Divyāvadāna, A Collection of Early Buddhist Legends*. (Delhi: Indological Book House, 1987): 392.

[117] Samuel Beal (trans). *The Romantic Legend of Śākya Buddha: A Translation of the Chinese Version of the Abhiniṣkramaṇasūtra*. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1985): 193-4.

for this frieze, it had further presence in Cave 1, as well as in Caves 16 and 17. By the same token, Ārya Śūra's *Jātakamālā* can be related to paintings within Caves 1, 2, 16 and 17, the *Lalitavistara*[118] to Cave 2, Aśvaghoṣa's *Saundarananda*[119] to Cave 16, and to Cave 17 alone a number of other texts are traced: Kumāralāta's *Kalpanāmaṇḍitikā*,[120] Kālidāsa's *Raghuvaṃśa*,[121] a palm-leaf manuscript discovered in Central Asia called *MQR 1069*, which would also have influenced a frieze in Aurangabad's Cave 3,[122] and possibly the *Kāraṇḍavyūha*.[123]

Following Schlingloff's lead, I will accept these literary texts as direct models for many of the narratives illustrated in Caves 1, 2, 16, and 17. Yet, one should understand that this acceptance is a pragmatic strategy, to foster interpretation. Most of *the jātaka* stories and tales of the Buddha's life represented at Ajaṇṭā would have had vivid oral traditions of transmission in addition to the known written textual traditions. Naturally the two overlapped and cross-fertilized one other, but because of our ignorance of the oral redactions, there is no certainty that the written were those used at the site. In some cases, it seems, extant texts were followed with what Schlingloff deems "extreme precision."[124] At

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[118] S. Lefmann (ed). *Lalitavistara, Leben und Lehre des Śākya-Buddha*. 2 vol. (Halle: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses, 1902-8); Vaidya. *Lalitavistara;* Ph. E. Foucaux (trans). "Le Lalita Vistara," *Annales du Musée Guimet.* 6 (1884) & 19 (1892); Gwendolyn Bays. (trans. of Foucaux). *The Voice of the Buddha: The Beauty of Compassion (The Lalitavistara Sūtra).* 2 volumes. (Berkeley: Dharma Publishing, 1983).

[119] Aśvaghoṣa. *The Saundarananda of Aśvaghoṣa.* Ed. and trans. by E. H. Johnston. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975).

[120] Heinrich Lüders. *Bruchstücke Buddhistischer Dramen; Bruchstücke der Kalpanāmaṇḍitikā des Kumāralāta.* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1979); Édouard Huber (trans). *Aśvaghoṣa, Sūtrālaṃkāra, traduit en Française sur la version chinoise de Kumārajīva.* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1908).

[121] Kālidāsa. *The Raghuvaṃsa of Kālidāsa*. Ed. by G. G. Nandargikar. (Motilal Banarsidass, 1971).

[122] Schlingloff. *Studies in the Ajanta Paintings,* 96-101.

[123] Parasurama Lakshmana Vaidya (ed). *Mahāyāna Sūtra Saṃgraha, Part I.* (Darbhanga: Mithila Insitute of Post-Graduate Studies and Research in Sanskrit Learning, 1961): 258-308.

[124] Schlingloff. *Studies in the Ajanta Paintings,* 150.

other times, the painted narrative appears to have been influenced by two disparate traditions simultaneously. Cave 17's depiction of the Śyāma Jātaka, for instance, follows the MSV tradition, except for one narrative element, which is found only in Kālidāsa's *Raghuvaṃśa*: this would suggest that the painter either composed his own favorite version of the story from the various literary sources or that both the MSV and Kālidāsa drew upon a narrative fund, whose only representative is the painting itself. In other places, where a textual reference is not forthcoming, Schlingloff attributes such deviations to the artist's personal vision. The potential for relationship between various traditions, either oral or textual, is further exemplified by Cave 17's *Siṃhalāvadāna* painting. Schlingloff assures his readers that the MSV, as transmitted through the *Divyāvadāna*, was the painter's model here.[125] However, when one turns to the written text, the *Divyāvadāna* is found to have omitted the story's central portion, and instead tells the reader "the entire *Rākṣasī sūtra* should be recited at length."[126] Przyluksi notes that this *Rākṣasī sūtra* is preserved in the *Ekottarāgama* (T. 125), and tells precisely the story one would expect here, that of a flying horse who saves shipwrecked mariners from an island of ogresses.[127] The same story is preserved in the Mahāyāna's *Kāraṇḍavyūha*, as a celebration of Avalokiteśvara's wonderworking. Not only did oral traditions inspire disparate written versions of a tale, but the coherent reading of some of Ajaṇṭā's paintings may rely upon appeal to what would seem *prima facie* unconnected literary traditions.

With this in mind, it becomes problematic that a near majority of the identified narratives at Ajaṇṭā were based upon the MSV. Whereas some vinayas are quite spare, presenting the monastic rules with a slight admixture of narrative, the MSV varies widely

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[125] Schlingloff. *Studies in the Ajanta Paintings,* 263.

[126] *vistareṇa rākṣasīsūtraṃ sarvaṃ vādyam* | Cowell and Neil. *Divyāvadāna*, 524.

[127] Jean Przyluski. "The Horse Balaha and the Indian Kings," *Indian Historical Quarterly.* 13 (1937): 223.

from chapter to chapter, some containing rule after rule, and some being a hodge-podge of tales. The MSV served as the basis for such narrative collections as the *Divyāvadāna* and *Avadānaśataka*, as well as being widely cited by the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra* attributed to Nāgārjuna. On this point, Gnoli suggests:

> This Vinaya must have enjoyed a noticeable fortune . . . on account of its unusual literary qualities. Jātakas, avadānas, vyākaraṇas, sūtras, tales written in a style both plain and vivid, relieve the dry enumeration of the disciplinary duties, that ruled the life of the Buddhist communities.[128]

Nevertheless, the further observation that this vinaya itself is "not a homogenous work, marked by a unity of conception, but rather an aggregate of different texts, laid down in different epochs, and subsequently patched up together"[129] suggests that we cannot hold too tenaciously to the MSV itself as being the site's major inspiration, based solely upon Lalou's and Schlingloff's associations.

Again let us look at an example from Schlingloff's work. In the course of an identification, Schlingloff's methodology forced him to attribute a relief from Bhārhut to the MSV.[130] However, a Mūlasarvāstivāda sect, let alone its vinaya, did not exist at the time of Bhārhut's creation. And thus Schlingloff was forced to concede that this Bhārhut medallion was based upon an early redaction of the *jātaka*, now lost, which was later included in the MSV collection. Needless to say, many such stories, though included in the MSV, may well have retained their own parallel and independent lives in Ajaṇṭā's day.

Despite these caveats, because I still plan to utilize the MSV as if it had direct influence upon Ajaṇṭā, there is one implication for the site's patronage I must now address. As the reader should be aware, the *vinaya* is the division of the Buddhist canon pertaining to the rules and regulations of monastic life. As a canonical and nomological text, its

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[128] Gnoli. *Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabhedavastu,* vol. 1, xxii.

[129] Gnoli. *Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabhedavastu,* vol. 1, xx.

[130] Schlingloff. *Studies in the Ajanta Paintings,* 228.

overwhelming presence at Ajaṇṭā is intriguing, for this will provide a clear *point d'appui* from which to recover the sectarian affiliations and doctrines of Ajaṇṭā's monastic community.[131] Unfortunately, the MSV is not without its controversies. The dating, geographical provenance, and contents of this text are all disputed, and I will treat these difficulties in a subsequent chapter. Here, the problem is simply that *as a vinaya* it is uncertain who would have had access to the MSV. Who was responsible for the scenes depicted at Ajaṇṭā if they were modeled on the MSV? Spink's historical reconstructions often characterize the site as micro-managed by donors and architects in far away Vatsagulma. If such were the case, it would not have been at all unlikely that one or more monks, such as Cave 26's Buddhabhadra, might have advised these donors and architects. Schlingloff and others have assumed that the paintings were laid-out by the painters themselves, who were members of professional family-guilds hired by the various patrons. The MSV's testimony on the decoration of monasteries does not settle this matter. In a later addition to this text, the *Kṣudrakavastu*, it is told that Anāthapiṇḍada wished to paint the Jetavana monastery, which he felt lacked majesty. Unsure of the propriety of this undertaking, he requested the Buddha's permission, and, receiving it, hired painters for

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[131] In line with the predominant trend of scholarship I refer to this text as the *Mūlasarvāstivādin vinaya*, based upon the name given the text in the Tibetan *bKah 'gyur* and I-Tsing's testimony to wide-flung presence of this sect in the late seventh century (*A Record of the Buddhist Religion as Practiced in India and the Malay Archipelago (AD 671-695)*. Trans. by J. Takakusu. [Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1982]: 8-10). Nevertheless, the colophon at the end of the Gilgit manuscript of the *Saṅghabhedavastu*, the MSV's final chapter, reads "*vinaye saṅghabhedavastu samāptaḥ* | | noch ⊙ | (| *vinayava)stvāgamaṃ* | | ⊙ | | " (Klaus Wille. *Die Handschriftliche Überlieferung des Vinayavastu der Mūlasarvāstivādin*. [Stuttgart: Frans Steiner Verlag, 1990]: 17). Here this work is named simply as a "canonical text on monastic matters," without any specification of the sect to which it belonged. As Klaus Wille also points out, this *Vinayavastu-āgama* does not by itself comprise the entirety of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya*. A vinaya properly includes 1) paracanonical material, i.e., the *Prātimokṣa* and the *Karmavācanā*, both of which are available in Sanskrit (cf. Anukul Chandra Banerjee. *Two Buddhist Vinaya Texts in Sanskrit: Prātimokṣa Sūtra and Bhikṣukarmavākya*. [Calcutta: World Press Private, 1977]); 2) canonical material, i.e., the Sūtravibhaṅga (an analysis of the Prātimokṣa), the Skandhaka (=the above name *Vinayavastvāgama*, plus the *Vinayakṣudrakavastu*), as well as various appendices, the *Vinaya-uttaragrantha;* finally 3) non-canonical commentaries, which for the Mūlasarvāstivāda tradition are preserved in Tibetan with the exception of a portion of Guṇaprabha's commentary on the Pravrajyāvastu, retrieved in Sanskrit (cf. P. V. Bapat and V. V. Gokhale (eds). *Vinaya-Sūtra and Auto-Commentary on the Same by Guṇaprabha, Chapter I - Pravrajyā-vastu*. [Patna: K. P. Jayswal Research Institute, 1982]).

the task. The painters did not themselves know what to depict, so Anāthapiṇḍada again inquired of the Buddha, who replied:

> On the outer door, you should represent a yakṣa holding a staff; in the vestibule (*niryūha*), the Great Miracle [at Śrāvastī] and the Wheel [of Existence] in five divisions; in the pavilion (*maṇḍapa*), a cycle of jātaka stories (*jātakamālā*[132]); at the entrance to the Gandhakuṭī, yakṣas holding garlands; in the assembly hall (*upasthānaśala*), the most venerable monk [=Buddha] descending [from Trāyastriṃśa heaven] to teach the Dharma; in the kitchen, yakṣas holding food; on the treasury door, a yakṣa with an iron hook; at the well, nāgas adorned with ornaments, holding water vessels; in the bathhouse and steam-room, sufferings from the *Deva-sūtra*[133] or the different hells; in the infirmary, the Tathāgata giving treatment; in the toilet, a horrible cemetery; on cell doors, draw a skeleton and skull.[134]

Of all the excavations at Ajaṇṭā, Cave 17 clearly comes closest to this description. Nevertheless, the MSV still does not specify which scenes should be depicted as part of the cloister's so-called *jātakamālā*, though it surely suggests that Buddha (and later the saṅgha) was accepted as the authority to be consulted on this matter.

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[132]Note that I-Tsing (*A Record of the Buddhist Religion,* 163) uses the term *jātakamālā* as a generic description of any cycle of Jātaka stories as well as the title of a specific, highly popular work, possibly Śūra's. Accordingly, Ārya Śūra's *Jātakamālā* can not be taken as the referent of this prescription, though clearly its stories were included in at least one vihāra's decoration.

[133] As first suggested by Marcelle Lalou ("Notes sur la Décoration des Monastéres Bouddhiques," *Revue des Artes Asiatiques.* 5 [1928]: 183-185), this is probably the "Devadūta sutta," the Divine Messengers Sūtra, found in the Pāli canon's *Majjhima-nikāya* (I. B. Horner (trans). *The Collection of the Middle Length Sayings (Majjhima-Nikāya).* [London: Pāli Text Society, 1987]: vol. 3, 223-230) and *Aṅguttara-nikāya* (F. L. Woodward (trans). *The Book of the Gradual Sayings (Aṅguttara-Nikāya).* [London: Luzac, 1960]: 121-125), as well as an independent text translated into the Chinese as "The Sūtra of the Five Divine Messengers." In brief, this sūtra claims that in the course of an individual's life, Yama, the lord of hells, will send five messengers to remind him of the proximity of death and turn him towards the Dharma. These messengers range from a baby boy fallen prostrate in his own excrement to a three-day dead decomposing corpse. The sūtra's second part describes the horrific tortures that individual will undergo if he ignores Yama's messengers.

[134]*de shig phyi sgor gnod sbyin lag na dbyug thogs 'brir bcug nas | sgo khang du ni cho 'phrul chen po dang 'khor lo cha lnga pa | khyams su ni skyes ba'i rabs kyi phreng ba | dri gtsang khang gi sgor ni gnod sbyin lag na phreng ba thogs pa dag | rim gro'i khang bar ni gde slong gnas brtan gnas brtan chos rnam par gtan la 'babs par byed pa | bkad sar ni gnod sbyin lag na zas thogs pa dag | mdzod kyi sgor ni gnod sbyin lag na lcags kyu thogs pa dag | chu'i khang bar ni klu lag na bum pa thogs pa rgyan snags tshogs kyis brgyan pa dag | khrus khang dam | bsro khang du ni lha'i mdo las 'byung ba 'am | gzhan dmyal ba'i rabs | nad pa'i sman khang du ni de bzhin gshegs pa nad pa'i nad gyog mdzad pa | chab khung sar ni dur khrod shin tu 'jigs su rung ba | gnas khang gi sgor ni rus pa'i keng rus dang mgo'i thod pa bri'o |* (Peking 87-3-4 -- 87-3-8 [=bKa' 'gyur De 213^{a}3 f.])

As some of the stories at Ajaṇṭā may have come from the MSV itself, the question becomes, would this vinaya have been accessible to all, or only the monks? I have found only spotty evidence on this point, and none from the MSV itself. The *Abhiniṣkramaṇa sūtra* records a story placed at the time of Kāśyapa Buddha, in which a child (whose father had become a monk) was allowed to hear a certain segment of the Dharma, "but the other part of it, with respect to discipline, he was not allowed to hear. This having happened more than once, he inquired the reason, and was told that only the Bhikshus were allowed to hear the entire rules of the community."[135] A kin tradition is recorded in the Khotanese *Book of Zambasta*, which numbers among those who are *not* to be saved by Maitreya, monks "who will reveal to the householders all the secrets in the *Prātimokṣa*, which should be heard only by a monk." For by doing so, "they will corrupt the householders. They will destroy their faith."[136] One might presume because the monks were not abiding by that *Prātimokṣa*. Further, I-Tsing reports that the *Prātimokṣa* is the first text a novice learns, the larger vinaya follows thereupon, and only after mastering these texts can he read the śūtras and ś*āstras*.[137] It may be probable that, *if* the paintings depicted on Ajaṇṭā's walls were based upon the MSV directly, the monks would have had a hand in their artistic representation. Not a radical point perhaps, but it reminds us that as Ajaṇṭā's vihāras and caityas were ultimately intended as gifts for the Buddhist saṅgha, this single segment of the site's community may have had a great deal of control over every aspect of the excavation and decoration. Since we have no evidence through which to determine conclusively whether the stories as depicted were in fact based upon this text directly or upon oral versions thereof, this is a large 'if.' Nevertheless, one should scrutinize the stipulations of

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[135] Beal. *Romantic Legend*, 359.

[136] R. E. Emmerick (ed. and trans). *The Book of Zambasta*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1968): 341.

[137] I-Tsing. *Record of the Buddhist Religion*, 102-3.

vinaya and spatial requirements of Buddhist liturgy when exploring Ajaṇṭa's artifacts. The fact that we can identify an appropriate vinaya with any degree of probability is fortunate indeed.

So far I have introduced three sets of textual sources, all of which may in some way be directly linked to Ajaṇṭā: 1) Ajaṇṭā's inscriptions (along with other contemporary epigraphs that allow one to consider these within their generic context); 2) Ārya Śūra's *Jātakamālā*, the single text indisputably known to the local community; and 3) the possible models for specific narrative depictions at Ajaṇṭā, whose identifications are based upon the assumption that literary, rather than oral, traditions were directly responsible for the work. Working from here, the next step in this inverted pyramid of sources, comprises those texts which would have been current at the time of the caves, and may have been known to their community. These literary sources come to our attention in a number of ways. Bāṇabhaṭṭa's *Harṣacarita*, for instance, mentions two Buddhist texts as actively used by his contemporaries. First, in a description of the ministrations made to Harṣa's father at the time of death, Bāna notes that among the general activities people were reciting the *Mahāmāyūrī*;[138] second, in the description of the forest monastery of Divākaramitra, a monk who becomes Harṣa's spiritual advisor, we read that "devout householder pigeons, skilled in the teachings of the Śākya, were explicating the *[Abhidharma]kośa*."[139]

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[138] Bāṇabhaṭṭa. *The Harshacarita of Bāṇabhaṭṭa*. Ed. by P. V. Kane. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1965): 21; Bāṇabhaṭṭa. *The Harṣa-carita of Bāṇa*. Trans. by E. B. Cowell and F. W. Thomas. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1961): 137. For the *Mahāyāyūrī* see: H. Oldenbourg. "Mahāmāyūrī Vidyārājñī," *Zapiski Vostochnago Otdelenija Imp. Russk. Archeol. Obschestva*. 11 (1899): 218-261; Sylvain Lévi. "Le Catalogue Géographique des Yakṣa dans la Mahāmāyūrī," *Journal Asiatique*. xi serie. 5 (1915): 19-138; Shuyo Takubo (ed). *Ārya-Mahā-Māyūrī-Vidyā-Rajñī*. (Tokyo: Sankibo, 1972).

[139] *paramopāsakaiḥ śukair api śākyaśāsanakuśalaiḥ kośaṃ samupadiśadbhiḥ* Bāṇabhaṭṭa. *Harshacarita* (Sanskrit ed. of Kane), 76; Bāṇabhaṭṭa. *Harṣa-carita* (Eng. trans of Cowell and Thomas), 236. For the *Abhidharmakośa* see: Vasubandhu. *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam of Vasubandhu*. Ed. by P. Pradhan. (Patna: Kashi Prasad Jayaswal Research Institute, 1975); Vasubandhu. *Abhidharmakośa and Bhāṣya of Ācārya Vasubandhu with Sphūṭārthā Commentary of Ācārya Yaśomitra*. Ed. by Dwarika Das Shastri. (Varanasi: Bauddha Bharati, 1987); Vasubandhu. *L'Abhidharmakośa de Vasubandhu*. 6 volumes. Trans. by Louis de la Vallée Poussin. (Bruxelles: Institut Belge des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1980); Vasubandhu. *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam*. 4

Furthermore, Divākaramitra tells a story in which he reveals himself as an heir of Nāgārjuna, and alludes to the renowned friendship between Nāgārjuna and a Śātavāhana king as a model for the proper relationship between himself and King Harṣa. The story of this friendship between a famous Buddhist philosopher and the great Śātavāhana was kept alive through Nāgārjuna's *Suhṛllekha*,[140] and, indeed, I-Tsing reports this text as very popular, and that students learned it early in their course of instruction.[141] Other texts I-Tsing reports as standard literature for a Buddhist monk include: two poems of Mātṛceṭa (one of which was commented upon by Dignāga), which treat the six *pāramitās* and eulogize the Buddha but are taught to Hīnayānists and Mahāyānists alike;[142] the *Samāntamukha* chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra*, in praise of Avalokiteśvara;[143] the *Mahāpari-nirvāṇa sūtra*;[144] the *Jātakamālā* (albeit as I noted above this title designates a genre as well as Ārya Śūra's text); Candragomin's *Lokānandanāṭaka*, a dramatic retelling of the

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volumes. Trans. by Leo M. Pruden from the French translation of Louis de La Vallée Poussin. (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1988).

[140] Leslie Kawamura (trans). *Golden Zephyr*. (Emeryville, CA.: Dharma Publishing, 1975); Lindtner. *Nāgārjuniana*, 218-224.

[141] I-Tsing. *Record of the Buddhist Religion*, 158-163.

[142] Mātṛceṭa. *The Śātapañcāśataka of Mātṛcṭa*. Ed. and Trans. by D. R. Shackleton Bailey. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951); Pierre Python. *Vinaya-viniścaya-Upali-paripṛcchā*. (Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1973).

[143] Hendrik Kern and Bunyiu Nanjio (eds). *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*. Bibliotheca Buddhica vol. 10. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1992): 438-56; Parasurama Lakshmana Vaidya (ed). *Saddharma-puṇḍarīkasūtram*. (Darbhanga: Mithila Insitute of Post-Graduate Studies and Research in Sanskrit Learning, 1960): 250-57; Hirofumi Toda (ed). *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra: Central Asian Manuscripts Romanized Text*. (Tokushima: Kyoiku Khuppan Center, 1981): 206-211; Hendrik Kern (trans). *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka or The Lotus of the True Law*. (New York: Dover, 1963): 406-418; Leon Hurvitz (trans). *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma (The Lotus Sūtra), Translated from the Chinese of Kumārajīva*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976): 311-319.

[144] Ernst Waldschmidt (ed). *Das Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*. 3 parts. Abhandlungen der Deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin, Philosophisch-historische Klasse Jahrgang 1949 No. 1, Jahrgang 1950 No. 2, Jahrgang 1950 No. 3. (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1950-51).

Viśvantara Jātaka, is said to have been sung and performed throughout Indian Asia;[145] finally, I-Tsing mentions Aśvaghoṣa's *Sūtrālaṃkāraśāstra,*[146] and the *Buddhacarita.*[147] Other texts to be included in this tier of sources are the *Daśakumāracarita*,[148] the *Harṣacarita*, the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*,[149] numerous *purāṇas* and Pāñcarātra *saṃhitās*, the *Mattavilāsaprahasana*,[150] and the *Nāgānandanāṭaka.*[151] Non-Buddhist texts all, these works either represent or discuss Buddhists as an integral community, giving us insight into how outsiders thought and spoke of Buddhists. Within the sphere of Buddhist literature, the Gilgit manuscripts are of exceptional value, as they are the best records we have for examining the mentalité of a Buddhist community contemporary with Ajaṇṭā's

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[145] Candragomin. *Candragomins Lokānandanāṭaka*. Ed. and trans. by Michael Hahn. (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 1974); Candragomin. *Joy for the World*. Trans. by Michael Hahn. (Berkeley: Dharma Publishing, 1987).

[146] The text named here *Sūtrālaṃkāra* attributed to Aśvaghoṣa is perhaps Kumāralāta's *Kalpanāmaṇḍitikā*, which we have already found to have been known to Ajaṇṭā's community. Apparently, Kumārajīva, who translated this work into Chinese c. 402-412 was the first to make this mistaken attribution which I-Tsing follows. However, the colophon of a 4th century Sanskrit manuscript of the work, first edited by Lüders, identifies the author and title as "Kumāralāta" and "Kalpanāmaṇḍitikā" respectively on several occassions (*Bruchstücke Buddhistischer Dramen,* 137). See also E. J. Thomas. "Aśvaghoṣa and Alaṃkāra," *Indian Culture*. 13 (1947): 143-46 for further study of this text's authorship.

[147] Aśvaghoṣa. *Aśvaghoṣa's Buddhacarita, or, Acts of the Buddha, in three parts*. Ed. and trans. by E. H. Johnston. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984).

[148] Daṇḍin. *The Daśakumāracarita of Daṇḍin*. Ed. and trans. by M. R. Kale. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986).

[149] Varāhamihira. *Bṛhatsaṃhitā, with the commentary of Bhaṭṭotpala*. (Varanasi: Varanaseya Sanskrit Vishvavidyalaya, 1968); Varāhamihira. *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*. Ed. and trans. by M. Ramakrishna Bhat. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1981).

[150] Mahendravikramavarman. *Mattavilāsaprahasana*. Ed. and trans. by N. P. Unni. (Trivandrum: College Book House, 1974).

[151] Vidhushekhara Bhattacharya (ed). *Nāgānanda-Nāṭaka of Śrī Harṣadeva*. (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1957); Henry Willis Wells (ed). *Six Sanskrit plays: In English Translation*. (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1964).

own;[152] needless to add, the presence of the MSV at Gilgit and the apparent popularity of this codex at Ajaṇṭā, as well as evidence (to be treated in the *Dharma* chapter) that Ajaṇṭā's community included refugee monks from the North-West, suggests a stronger link between these two locales than is at first apparent.

This list is by no means complete. To name of two works cited in the subsequent chapters that have not yet been mentioned, there are the *Abhisamācārikā*, a vinaya text belonging to the Lokottaravāda branch of the Mahāsāṃghika sect that was preserved in a Sanskrit manuscript in Tibet,[153] and the *Book of Zambasta*, a popular work composed at the request of a Khotanese official. In the end, despite my pretense of setting a 'canon' of sources for the study of Ajaṇṭā, the hermeneutic principles elaborated in the first section of this chapter leaves the upper level of this inverted pyramid indeterminate and functionally boundless.

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[152] Raghu Vira and Lokesh Chandra (eds). *Gilgit Buddhist Manuscripts (Facsimile Edition)*. Śata-Piṭaka Series 10. (New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture, 1974); Nalinaksha Dutt (ed). *Gilgit Manuscripts*. 4 volumes. (Delhi: Sri Satguru, 1984); A. Nakamura. "Gilgit Manuscript of the *Mahāsannipātaratnaketusūtra*, Kept in the National Archives, Katmandu," *Hokke-Bunka Kenkyu*. 1 (1975): 13-37; Gregory Schopen. *The Bhaiṣajyaguru-Sūtra and the Buddhism of Gilgit*. Ph.D. Thesis. (Canberra: Australian National University, 1978); Gregory Schopen. "The Five Leaves of the *Buddhabalādhānaprātihāryavikurvāṇanirdeśa-Sūtra* Found at Gilgit," *Journal of Indian Philorophy*. 5 (1978): 319-336; Gregory Schopen "The Manuscript of the *Vajracchedikā* Found at Gilgit." In *Studies in the Literature of the Great Vehicle: Three Mahāyāna Buddhist Texts*. Ed. by Luis O. Gómez and Jonathan A. Silk. (Ann Arbor: Collegiate Institute for the Study of Buddhist Literature and Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, The University of Michigan, 1989): 89-139; Adelheid Mette. "Zwei kleine Fragmente aus Gilgit," *Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik*. 7 (1981): 133-151; Chandrabhal Tripathi. "Gilgit-Blätter der Mekhalā-dhāraṇī," *Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik*. 7 (1981): 153-161; Oskar von Hinüber (ed). *A New Fragmentary Gilgit Manuscript of the Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra*. (Tokyo: The Reiyukai, 1982); Okubo Yusen. "The Ekottara-āgama Fragments of the Gilgit Manuscript -- Romanized Text," *Bukkyo Semina*. 35 (1982): 120-91; Yael Bentor. "The Redactions of the *Adbhutadharmaparyāya* from Gilgit," *Journal of the International Assoication of Buddhist Studies*. 11 (1988): 21-52.

[153] B. Jinanda (ed). *Abhisamācārikā (Bhikṣuprakīrṇaka)*. (Patna: Kashi Prasad Jayaswal Research Institute, 1969); Sanghasen Singh and Kenryo Minowa. "A Critical Edition and Translation of the *Abhisamācārikā Nāma Bhikṣuprakīrṇakaḥ* (Chapter One)," *Buddhist Studies* 12 (1988): 81-146.

PART II

THE THREE JEWELS AND OTHER VALUABLES

CHAPTER III

SAṄGHA: AJAṆṬĀ'S COMMUNITY AND ITS PATRONS

A Brief Reprise, The Three Jewels

I go for refuge to the Buddha. I go for refuge to the Dharma. I go for Refuge to the Saṅgha. Whether one declares this before a congregation or in silent solitude, by reciting these refuges one becomes a 'Buddhist.' With this formula one accepts a canon of signs that encode what someone who is a Buddhist accepts as his religious ideal -- the Buddha -- accepts as his religious beliefs and practices -- the Dharma -- and accepts as his religious community -- the Saṅgha.

The Three Jewels express the range of symbolic values delimiting a Buddhist identity. As Ajaṇṭā's patrons supported the creation of iconic representations of Buddhism's ideals, participated mentally in its doctrines and physically in its rituals, and created a place for a community of its religious, so they constructed their own identities as Buddhists. Similarly, the Ajaṇṭā caves can be identified as a Buddhist site insofar as they contain representations of the Three Jewels. The full range of Ajaṇṭā's material remains -- paintings, sculptures, inscriptions, architectural plans, as well as minutiae, such as door-fittings, chiseling styles, plaster materials, and numerous other details -- are signs of an understanding, a set of values, a structure of meaning, shared by the site's community. The painting of a distressed princess in a *jātaka* illustration and the serene smile of a guardian sculpted at the entrance to a Buddha's shrine are religious artifacts alongside the site's monolithic icons and hagiographic renderings.

We may even speak of a Buddhist culture as predicated of the Three Jewels: the complex culture of Buddhism at the Ajaṇṭā Caves. Culture works to bind a community in its webs of significance as it supplies the shared signs through which a community knows its world and as it fosters a communally shared interpretation thereof. But the study of culture as a semeiotic enterprise works by reading a community's objects, its artifacts, as signs implicated in an indefinite web of interpretations. For the members of an ancient Indian Buddhist community, a knowledge of themselves *as Buddhists* involved an integration realized pragmatically in action. We designate this act of interpretation by other well-known terms: patronage, excavation, decoration. We find these Buddhists' religion in the iconographies accepted, iconologies intended, decorative schemes, donative formulae used, epithets adopted. Signs all, meaningful as public and shared displays. Through these acts the public selves of ancient Buddhists have themselves become objects, which in our modern academic environment are signs for analysis. Indeed, all three elements of Pierce's triadic sign are present equally in my study of Buddhist culture at Ajaṇṭā: the *object* is the self-understanding of Ajaṇṭā's community represented in the Ajaṇṭā caves *as sign;* the interpretant being this very dissertation you read presently.

The preceding chapters sought to present Ajaṇṭā's historical setting, to delineate the body of sources apropos to Ajaṇṭā's study, and to explicate an understanding of how this history and these texts exist *as sources* for the study of Ajaṇṭā. I designated these matters "prolegomena" to signal my expectation that the material contained therein provides the foundation for any study of Ajaṇṭā's religious culture. I now begin the dissertation's second half, wherein one such study will be attempted. As should be clear by now, my aim is to explicate Buddhism at Ajaṇṭā as the manifest expression of a community's self-understanding. Because I treat religion at Ajaṇṭā as a matter of public display, I find it necessary to first determine what that 'public' was and who was included within it. This is

why, although one goes for refuge first to the Buddha, and then the Dharma, and Saṅgha, I will treat these Three Jewels in reverse order, the Ajaṇṭā's community being the subject of the present chapter.

Delimiting Ajaṇṭā's Saṅgha

What is the Buddhist *saṅgha*? One answer, that given to the householder Anāthapiṇḍada when he first asked this question, reads as follows: "O householder, there are sons of good family, belonging to *kṣatriya* families, who cut off their beards and hair, put on red robes, and with proper faith follow in renunciation the Blessed One, who himself went forth from the home to the homeless life. Similarly, there are sons of good family, belonging to *brāhmaṇa* families, to *vaiśya* families, and to *śūdra* families, who cut off their beards and hair, put on red robes, and with proper faith follow in renunciation the Blessed One, who himself went forth from the home to the homeless life. This, O householder, is called the 'saṅgha.'"[1]

Here is one elementary way Buddhists explain the saṅgha: the community of monks. Too overly inclusive, this definition little helps one to identify Ajaṇṭā's particular saṅgha. Nor, however, does it exhaust the Buddhist understanding of what constitutes a 'saṅgha.' Within the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*, the Buddhist saṅgha is further categorized under a number of rubrics, which may be analyzed into two basic modes: the enumeration of internal divisions within the saṅgha and the distinguishing between different individual saṅghas. In regard to the first, perhaps the most inclusive list of divisions within a saṅgha

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[1] *santi gṛhapate kṣatriyakulād api kulaputrāḥ keśaśmaśrū avatārya kāṣāyāṇy vastrāṇy ācchādya samyag eva śraddhayā anāgārād anāgārikāṃ tam eva bhagavantaṃ pravrajitaṃ anupravrajitāḥ; brāhmaṇakulād api vaiśyakulād api śūdrakulād api kulaputrāḥ keśaśmaśrū avatārya kāṣāyāṇi vastrāṇi ācchādya samyag eva śraddhayā anāgārād anāgārikāṃ tam eva bhagavantaṃ pravrajitaṃ anupravrajitāḥ; sa eṣa gṛhapate saṅgho nāma*. Raniero Gnoli (ed). *The Gilgit Manuscript of the Śayanāsanavastu and the Adhikaraṇavastu, Being the 15th and 16th Sections of the Vinaya of the Mūlasarvāstivādin*. (Rome: Instituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1978): 15. I have read the manuscript's *anāgarād* as *āgārād* in both instances.

is found at the beginning of the MSV's Ś*ayanāsanavastu*, the Chapter on Lodgings. In this story, monks residing at the Jetavana monastery in Śrāvastī argue among themselves as to which monk is the most worthy of honor and respect, and therefore worthy of the first seat, first water, and first alms. The possibilities enumerated include, a Śākya renunciate, a brāhmaṇa renunciate, a kṣatriya renunciate, a vaiśya renunciate, a śūdra renunciate, a renunciate from a high family, a renunciate from a wealthy noble family, a monk who is handsome, comely, pleasing, one who speaks well, one skilled in the pronunciation of words, a well-known monk, a monk possessing much merit, a preserver of sūtras, a preserver of the vinaya, a preserver of the *mātṛkās*, a learned monk, a preacher of the Dharma, a Sthavira, a royal monk, a monk who dwells in the forest, a monk who keeps only three robes, one who wears robes of felt, one who wears robes taken from the dust-heap, one who lives only on alms begged, one who eats in a single sitting, one who does not eat after the time to cease, one who dwells at the roots of trees, one who dwells in cemeteries, a monk who dwells in the open air, a monk who sleeps in a sitting posture, a monk who takes any seat that is offered, a monk who has attained awareness of impermanence, and finally an arhat who meditates upon the eight deliverances.[2]

In the end, none of these monks is placed at the head of the saṅgha as the most worthy, deserving of the first seat, first water, and first alms. That distinction is reserved for the senior-most monk. Be this as it may, here the MSV analyzes Śrāvastī's saṅgha in terms of the familial backgrounds of its members, the types of learning they hold, the particular ascetic practices they undertake, and their individual levels of spiritual attainment. Echoing

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[2] *tatraike evam āhuḥ śākyaḥ pravrajita iti; anye tv evam āhuḥ yo brāhmaṇaḥ pravrajita iti; apare yaḥ kṣatriyaḥ pravrajita iti; apare yo vaiśyaḥ pravrajitaḥ; apare yaḥ śūdraḥ pravrajitaḥ; apare uccāt kalāt pravrajito 'nyūnāt; āḍhyāt kulāt pravrajito 'dīnāt; apare yo 'bhirūpo darśanīyaḥ prāsādikaḥ kalyāṇavākyo vākkaraṇenopeto jñāto mahāpuṇyaḥ sūtradharo vinayadharo mātṛkā-dharo bahuśruto dhārmakathikaḥ sthaviro rājanyaḥ āraṇyakaḥ traicīvariko nāmatikaḥ pāṃsukulikaḥ piṇḍapātikaḥ ekāsanikaḥ khalu paścādbhaktiko vṛkṣamūlikaḥ śmāśāniko 'bhyavakāśikaḥ naiṣadiko yathāsaṃstariko yo lābhī anityasaṃjñāyāḥ pūrvavad yāvat yo 'rhann aṣṭavimokṣadhyāyīti.* Gnoli. *Gilgit Manuscript of the Śayanāsanavastu,* 3.

this narrative's subtext of competition between set groups within the saṅgha, Hsüan-Tsang's testimony concerning monastic practices in Mathurā suggests that similar divisions and rivalries persisted at least as late as the seventh century: "In the 'Three Longs' of every year, and on the six Fastdays of every month, the Brethren with mutual rivalry make up parties, and taking materials of worship with many valuables, repair to the images of their special patrons. The Abhidharma Brethren offer worship to Sāriputra, the Samādhists to Mudgalaputra, the Sūtraists to Ānanda."[3] The pilgrim Fa-Hien observed much the same practices for the early fifth century as well, also in Mathurā.[4]

Internal divisions within the saṅgha based upon such matters as traditions of learning and spiritual practices are well documented within the MSV, and seem to have had a great deal of significance for the MSV's authors. Unfortunately, we possess no evidence from Ajaṇṭā that can be related directly to these textual precedents. Yet, Buddhist literature does hold a second way of specifying a saṅgha, one that is at both more restricted and more useful than the answer given to Anāthapiṇḍada: the individuation of local saṅghas based upon geography. This second approach has direct consequences for this dissertation's attempt to recover Ajaṇṭā's own saṅgha.

The most renowned of local saṅghas in the Buddhist corpus is doubtless that of the Vṛjiputrakas from the city of Vaiśālī. According to legend, by the time one hundred years had passed after the Buddha's *mahāparinirvāṇa*, the monks of Vaiśālī fell away from the Buddha's vinaya, breaking established rules on ten points, including eating after noon, drinking spirits, and handling gold and silver. These lapses were discovered by Yaśas, a monk from a region to the west of Vaiśālī, who convened a council of 700 monks from

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[3] Thomas Watters. *On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India (A.D. 629-645)*. (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1973): vol. 1, 302.

[4] Fa-Hien. *A Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms*. Trans. by James Legge. (New York: Dover, 1965): 44-46.

western India and the Deccan to judge the Vaiśālīan monks and set them straight.[5] The historical verity of this council and the details surrounding it are of less importance for us here than this tale's documentation of a Buddhist mentality that placed great import upon geography. One finds this emphasis in the distinction between eastern and western monastic traditions, in the care this tale's narrator takes to preserve the itinerary Yaśas followed as he solicited monks to join the council, and, of course, in the strong identification of the ill-behaved saṅgha with the city of Vaiśālī. At a slightly later moment in the Buddhist institutional history, one finds that schismatic *nikāyas* were occasionally identified by their geographical locations. For instance, several subsects of the Mahāsāṃghika *nikāya* were named after mountains surrounding the Amarāvatī stūpa, the *Pūrvaśaila* (East Mountain) and *Aparaśaila* (West Mountain); other *nikāyas* named for a location include the *Andhaka*, *Haimavata*, *Caitīya, Uttharāpathaka,* and *Sannagarika.* Again, in Sri Lanka, there are sects, such as the *Jetavanīya* and *Abhayagirivāsin*, named after the monasteries in which they originated.

Such geographical specificity seems to stand in opposition to characterizations of the Buddhist saṅgha as an organization of wandering mendicants having no fixed location: the *caturdiśa bhikṣusaṅgha*, the corporation of monks belonging to the four quarters. This epithet is found as 'early' as the composition of the Pāli canon.[6] And it is found as 'late' as the fifth century Bāgh copper plate of Mahārāja Subandhu, who makes a gift of a village in order, among other things, to supply members of the *caturdiśa bhikṣusaṅgha* with

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[5] See Étienne Lamotte (*History of Indian Buddhism: From the Origins to the Śaka Era.* [Louvain-la-Neuve: Institut Orientaliste, Universite de Louvain, 1988]: 124, n. 43) for a bibliography on the Buddhist councils.

[6] However, see Gregory Schopen ("Two Problems in the History of Indian Buddhism: The Layman/Monk Distinction and the Doctrines of the Transference of Merit," *Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik.* 10 [1984]: 9-47) for the problems with treating this canon as representative of 'early' Buddhism.

clothing, food, and so on.[7] Moreover, one finds that representing the saṅgha as a unity of nomadic mendicants did not preclude acknowledging the saṅgha to be rife with internal divisions. This is witnessed, for instance, in a dedication from the Valabhī King Guhasena, dated 575 C.E., where he grants goods to "the community of noble Ś*ākyabhikṣus* belonging to the eighteen *nikāyas*, who have come from many directions" (*nānādigabhyāga-tāṣṭādaśanikāyābhyantaraśākyāryyabhikṣusaṃgha*).[8]

In point of fact, there seems to have been a certain amount of slippage between the saṅgha conceived as a body of wandering mendicants and as residents associated with specific places. For instance, in the Pāli vinaya's *Cullavagga* (6.9.1) it is recorded that Anāthapiṇḍada established the Jetavana monastery, the principle dwelling place of Buddhist monks in Śrāvastī "for the Order of the four quarters, present and to come."[9] Yet, in the *Mahāvagga* (3.13.1) one also finds notice that the "saṅgha of Śrāvastī," dwelling at the Jetavana, made rules binding for its local members.[10] In the same vein, this tension may explain a distinction drawn between "*caturdiśa* monks" and "*bhikṣu* monks" in the *Ta pi-k'ieou san ts-ien wei yi* (*The Tree Thousand Good Manners of Great Monks*), a manual of Indian monastic life translated into Chinese sometime between 148-170 C.E.: "Nor should one take objects belonging to the *caturdiśa* monks and place them among the *bhikṣu* monks' things."[11] This text's "*bhikṣu* monks" would presumably be monks belonging to and identified with a specific monastery or locale, whereas the "*caturdiśa* monks" would

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[7] Vasudev Vishnu Mirashi. *Inscriptions of the Kalachuri-Chedi Era*. Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, volume IV. (Ootacamund: Government Epigraphist for India, 1955): 20-21.

[8] Georg Bühler. "A Grant of King Guhasena of Valabhī," *The Indian Antiquary*. 4 (1875): 175.

[9] I. B. Horner. *The Book of Discipline (Vinaya-Piṭaka) Volume V: Cullavagga*. (London: Pāli Text Society, 1988): 230.

[10] I. B. Horner. *The Book of Discipline (Vinaya-Piṭaka) Volume IV: Mahāvagga*. (London: Pāli Text Society, 1982): 202.

[11] Sylvain Lévi and Édouard Chavannes. "Quelques Titres Enigmatiques dans la Hiérarchie Ecclésiastique du Bouddhisme Indien," *Journal Asiatique*. xi Serie. 5 (1915): 216.

be wanderers. In the MSV, as well, the saṅgha in a particular locale is often described as *āvāsikanaivāsika*, i.e., comprised of resident monks and non-resident monks.

This tension between local and wandering monks raises interesting questions for Ajaṇṭā because of the nature of the site. As I noted in this dissertation's first half, this complex of monasteries and caityas had an inner tension vis-à-vis its patronage and its resident community. These were not a royal vihāras established in the capital city, in which lived monks fattened for state ceremonies. Rather, they were at quite a remove from the Vākāṭaka capital, in a territory that knew its share of war, along a route that led from Hariṣeṇa's Vatsagulma to the sea. This is not to say that Ajaṇṭā's monastic community may not have included *rājanya* monks, chartered by royal commission. And to be sure, the MSV is replete with stories of patrons who entice a single monk or community of monks to dwell semi-permanently in the monasteries they build. But we must also assume that this community included *caturdiśa* wandering monks, raising the question of how these monks, some perhaps belonging to different vinaya or doctrinal traditions, or hailing from different locales, or revering competing teachers, coalesced into a functional unit at Ajaṇṭā. Can we speak of 'Ajaṇṭā's saṅgha' as a corporate group, consisting of permanent residents whose number was supplemented by itinerant monks travelling along highways opened up by the brief pax Vākāṭaka, which linked the central Deccan with routes to India's western coast and the North?

I raise this issue for, as Sukumar Dutt has observed, "in its later development as a body corporate, it was the unitary character (*Samaggatā*) of each saṅgha that was taken as the basic principle of its constitution. A saṅgha could only function as an entire undivided body."[12] Dutt, here, is commenting upon the Buddhist traditions of the Aśokan era. But I-Tsing shows that this ideology of saṅghic unity continued at least as late as the seventh

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[12] Sukumar Dutt. *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries of India*. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988): 83.

century C.E. I-Tsing nostalgically recalls the close adherence to vinaya he witnessed in a monastery in Tāmralipti (a city on India's eastern coast) at which he resided, where "when any business happened, it was settled by the assembly; and that, if any priest decided anything by himself alone . . . without regarding the will of the assembly he was expelled."[13]

If saṅghic unity is so highly valued, how is it obtained and why is this important for the study of Ajaṇṭā? For a saṅgha to be unitary and unanimous it must first be defined in geographical terms. That is, before the saṅgha can gather as a corporate whole for the sake of performing monastic actions, it is necessary to determine which monks should be included in that whole. This is done by the setting of geographical boundaries. For monastic actions to be undertaken, distinct boundaries must be set whereby a single local saṅgha is identified. These boundaries, called *sīmā*, can define a large space using large, natural demarcations: "The Blessed One said: 'First, the resident monks and visiting monks should set fixed markers for a large boundary in all four directions. To the East, the marker [can be] a wall, tree, rock, rampart, or mountain-slope; to the South, West, and North, the marker [can be] a wall, tree, rock, rampart, or mountain-slope. . . . Following that, a single monk should make a motion and an action [of the saṅgha] may be performed.'"[14] Alternately the *sīmā* can be small, and adopt things such as a road, a designated rock, or pillars erected and set in the ground to mark its boundaries.[15] Indeed, within the Pāli

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[13] I-Tsing. *A Record of the Buddhist Religion as Practiced in India and the Malay Archipelago (AD 671-695)*. Trans. by J. Takakusu. (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1982): 62-63.

[14] *bhagavān āha | pūrvaṃ tāvad āvāsikanaivāsikair bhikṣubhir mahatyāḥ sīmāyāś caturdiśaṃ sthāvaranimittāni saṃlakṣayitavyāni | pūrvasyāṃ diśi kuḍyanimittaṃ vā vṛkṣanimittaṃ vā śailanimittaṃ vā prākāranimittaṃ vā prāgbhāranimittaṃ | dakṣiṇasyāṃ paścimāyām uttarasyāṃ diśi kuḍyanimittaṃ vā vṛkṣanimittaṃ vā śailanimittaṃ vā prākāranimittaṃ vā prāgbhāranimittaṃ | . . . tataḥ paścāt ekena bhikṣuṇa jñaptiṃ kṛtvā karma kartavyam |* Nalinksha Dutt (ed). *Gilgit Manuscripts.* (Delhi: Sri Satguru, 1984): vol. 3.4, 84.

[15] *mārgikaṃ vā kathikaṃ śilā vā ucchrāpitā kīlakā nikhātāḥ.* Dutt. *Gilgit Manuscripts,* vol. 3.4, 88.

tradition, one of the failings of the Vṛjiputraka monks from Vaiśālī was that they did not respect *sīmā* boundaries, or the requisite unity of the saṅgha within a *sīmā*. According to the *Cullavagga* (12.2.8), the monks of Vaiśālī allowed members of different residences (*āvāsa*) within a single *sīmā* to hold separate *Poṣadha* ceremonies -- contravening the singularity of the *sīmā* -- and they performed formal acts of the saṅgha without that saṅgha having all its members present -- contravening the requirement for unity.

This tale from the Pāli vinaya explicates one ideological current that may have been important for Ajaṇṭā, albeit this Pāli tale itself cannot be directly applied to this site, which I have been treating as related to the Mūlasarvāstivāda *nikāya*. The set of ten transgressions associated with the Vaiśālī's monks differ from Buddhist tradition to Buddhist tradition. And neither of the two points from the Pāli vinaya mentioned in the preceding paragraph is found in the MSV's account of the second council. Nevertheless, that the MSV's *Poṣadhavastu* (Chapter on Observance) stands within the same current is demonstrated by the following passage, one of many on this familiar theme: "A *bhikṣu* should go for the *Poṣadha* [ceremony] on the fifteenth [day of the half-month] from a dwelling where there are monks to a dwelling where there are monks, wherein the monks are pure and share the same views. A *bhikṣu* ought not to go for the *Poṣadha* on the fifteenth from a dwelling where there are monks to a dwelling where there are monks, wherein the monks are quarrelsome, mischief-makers, argumentative, contentious and litigious."[16]

Interestingly, the MSV's 'table of contents' describes the section containing this

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[16] *gantavyaṃ bhikṣuṇā tad eva poṣadhe pañcadaśyāṃ sabhikṣukād āvāsāt sabhikṣukam āvāsaṃ yatra bhikṣavo bhavanti pariṣuddhāḥ samānadṛṣṭayaḥ* | *na gantavyaṃ bhikṣuṇā tad eva poṣadhe pañcadaśyāṃ sabhikṣukād āvāsāt sabhikṣukam āvāsaṃ yatra bhikṣavo bhavanti kalakārakā bhaṇḍanakārakā vivādakārakā vigrahakārakā ādhikaraṇikāḥ* | Dutt *Gilgit Manuscripts,* vol. 3.4, 114-5.

passage as one concerned with "*bhedavimativyagra*,"[17] i.e., divisions, varying inclinations, and dis-unity. And one finds much the same vocabulary used in the *Abhidharmakośa's* discussion of this topic. Vasubandhu discusses a type of *saṅghabheda*, i.e., saṅghic schism, called a division due to actions, *karmabheda*.[18] Reading Vasubandhu's text in conjunction with that of his commentator, this occurs when there is dis-unity in monastic actions, such as when more than one *Poṣadha* ceremony is performed in a single *sīmā* by monks of varying inclinations. As a category of monastic action s*aṅghabheda* is the worst of the worst. However, we cannot determine whether *karmabheda* was at all acceptable, for Vasubandhu does not stipulate whether any demerit attaches to *karmabheda*; the *Kośa's* commentator merely adds that *karmabheda* is not like other types of *saṅghabheda* in that it does not result in the performer's immediate rebirth in the lowest hell.

So far I have framed the potential for internal tensions at Ajaṇṭā between monks of different orders around the distinction between resident and wandering monks. In this, I was implicitly following the MSV's distinction between resident and non-resident monks, with the assumption that the residents themselves were not in conflict or of varying inclinations. But this assumption may not be correct. Here is another problem we face in reconstructing Ajaṇṭā's saṅgha. Inscriptions nos. 58 and 90, from Caves 10 and 22, identify donors of intrusive period Buddha images as potentially members of *nikāyas* other than the Mūlasarvāstivāda. These donors may have belonged to the Cetika *nikāya* and Aparaśaila *nikāya* respectively. In both these cases, the donation with which the inscription is associated is fairly minor. Neither Cave 10's Cetika nor Cave 22's Aparaśaila

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[17] Dutt. *Gilgit Manuscripts*. vol. 3.4, 114.

[18] Text: *anyas tu saṃghabhedaḥ karmabhedād bhavati* | *yady ekasīmāyāṃ vyagrāḥ karmāṇi kurvanti* | Commentary: *anyas tu saṅghabheda iti* | *cakrabhedād anyaḥ* | *nātrānantaryam ity abhiprāyaḥ* | *yasmād asau karmabhedād bhavati* | *vyagrā iti* | *nānānmatayaḥ* | *karmāṇi* | *poṣadhādīni saṅghakarmāṇi* | Vasubandhu. *Abhidharmakośa and Bhāṣya of Ācārya Vasubandhu with Sphūṭārthā Commentary of Ācārya Yaśomitra*. Ed. by Dwarika Das Shastri. (Varanasi: Bauddha Bharati, 1987): 728.

donor can be viewed as a major or programmatic patron. These two may well serve as examples of non-resident monks, passing through. Yet, these examples raise the possibility that not all the *residents* at the site were affiliated with the Mūlasarvāstivāda *nikāya,* and raise the question: Was there a single monastic lineage, or did Ajaṇṭā's resident monks belong to a diversity of monastic lineages? In terms of the vinaya -- that is to say, in terms of *sīmā* boundaries -- did Ajaṇṭā have one saṅgha or did it have several?

Despite the significance of *sīmā* boundaries for defining individual local saṅghas, we have no evidence for whether the Ajaṇṭā caves as a whole were considered a single *āvāsa* within a single large *sīmā*; whether the individual caves were separate *āvāsas* within a single *sīmā;* or whether individual or smaller groups of caves were designated such that this quarter-mile horseshoe on the Waghora river was subdivided by numerous *sīmā* boundaries. The only documentation touching upon this issue is Hsüan-Tsang's description of Ajaṇṭā, which might be read as suggesting that the site functioned as a single unit of religious space. Hsüan-Tsang observed that "on the outside of the gate of the *saṅghārāma,* on the north and south side, at the right hand and the left, there is a stone elephant."[19] These elephants are likely the two that flank the entrance to a path leading from the Waghora river to Cave 16 (Figs. 25, 26). Hsüan-Tsang does not stipulate, however, whether the *saṅghārāma* whose gate these elephants flank is this single cave or the site as a whole; context would suggest the latter. Nevertheless, one must remember that Ajaṇṭā was probably not a functioning monastery at the time of Hsüan-Tsang's visit. The Chinese monk could be over-interpreting these elephants' significance within the site's overall programme. Indeed, numerous other caves, if not all, had their own paths to the river; at present evidence exists for Caves 4, 6, 7, 10, 16, 17, 19, and 26. In the present day,

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[19] Hsüan-Tsang. *Si-Yu Ki: Buddhist Records of the Western World, translated from the Chinese of Hiuen Tsiang (A.D. 629).* Trans. by Samuel Beal. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1981): vol. 2, 259.

Cave 16 is the only vihāra whose entryway and path from the river remain largely intact; it may have been so in Hsüan-Tsang's day as well.

Hsüan-Tsang's external evidence apropos to Ajaṇṭā's spatial and, therefore, ritual unity was not very helpful. This leaves internal evidence derived from programmes of excavation and decoration within the caves themselves. However, a full-blown attempt to interpret this latter species of data will lead me further afield than I wish to travel. That is, since I would rely upon Spink's relative chronology to contrast the motival and physical evidence found within individual caves, in order to implement this study of internal evidence I would have to reconsider first the site's relative chronology. This is a problem because Spink implicitly presupposes an original homogeneity in the site's architectural and decorative programmes. In terms of architecture, Spink presupposes that every one of Ajaṇṭā's vihāras was modeled upon a single type; the architectural genealogy of all Ajaṇṭā's vihāras being traced to the type represented by the first-period vihāra Cave 12, an astylar hall with monk's cells on three walls (Fig. 27). Accordingly, Spink understands motifs such as internal pillars, a central *maṇḍapa*, and Buddha-shrine excavated in the rear wall to be developments in ritual architecture *sui generis* at Ajaṇṭā (and Ghaṭotkaca), conceived by patrons and artists inspired by the artistic ferment surrounding them. Several other deviations from this genealogical forbearer, such as Cave 7's ground plan (Fig. 28), are explained by the constraints placed patrons and artisans due to physical circumstances, such as the proximity or positioning of adjacent caves; the anomalous architecture of Caves 14 and 20 (Figs. 29, 30) are explained by appeal to Ajaṇṭā's reconstructed history: these two caves look the way they do because their patrons' had to rush them to completion. Similarly, Spink assumes that all things being historically equal (which they were not), every vihāra would have been painted in a manner similar to Caves 1, 2, 16, and 17, with *jātakas*, scenes from the Buddha's life, and the like. I am not claiming that

Spink is mistaken on these matters, only that his silent imputation of a single ideal type for Ajaṇṭā's vihāras must be assessed before distinctions between the caves can associated with Buddhist institutional divisions. That done, I would then need to determine whether there is a basis for the assumption that art-historical and architectural variations can be attributed to internal divisions in the saṅgha, such as *nikāya* affiliations. This investigation would also require a study of the relationship between patron, artisan, and saṅgha vis-à-vis the conception and creation of monasteries.

Although space does not permit me to implement this investigation in a full or thoroughgoing manner, I do wish to pursue it briefly. Is there an internal basis for finding various *nikāyas* at work at Ajaṇṭā? In my presentation of a 'canon' useful for the discussion of Ajaṇṭā, I determined the Mūlasarvāstivāda *nikāya* might have had a major presence at the site because the painted Caves 1, 16, and 17 all contain narrative depictions that can be linked to versions of these stories now preserved exclusively in the MSV. In that same discussion I cited a passage from the MSV chartering representations just as we find them in these caves: jātakas on the walls, garland bearers at the entrance to the Buddha shrines, etc. And as I just noted, Spink expects that the other vihāras at Ajaṇṭā would have been similarly decorated, but were not because Ajaṇṭā's functional life as a Buddhist monastic site was foreshortened due to war. In addition to the caves renowned for their paintings, several other vihāras also retain programmatic painting. Let us focus upon those in Cave 20 (Fig. 31). Unlike Caves 1, 2, 16, and 17, Cave 20's walls seem not to have been covered with jātakā tales, but with simple bands of color and geometric designs. Indeed, in the same way that we turned to the MSV to give a literary precedent for the other caves, we might turn to the Pāli vinaya for Ajaṇṭā's Cave 20. In the *Cullavagga* (6.3.2), the Buddha forbids figural imagery: "Monks you should not have a bold design made with figures of women, figures of men. Whoever should have one made, there is an offence of wrong-

doing. I allow, monks, wreath-work, creeper-work, swordfish teeth, the five strips (of cloth design)."[20] On the one hand such restrictions as these could be viewed as having had an influence on Cave 20. Or, on the other, the simplicity of Cave 20's painted designs could be accounted for within Spink's chronology by the pressures leading up to the hiatus of 472, rather than by an attempt to adhere to vinayic restrictions.

Let us turn to the Bāgh caves for comparison. Bāgh is the only Buddhist monastic complex in India other than Ajaṇṭā at which sufficient paintings were preserved inside of monasteries to enable us to say something about this subject. Moreover, Spink's chronology places Bāgh as contemporaneous with Ajaṇṭā; he claims that when workmen fled Ajaṇṭa in the hiatus of 472, many went to Bāgh, whose vihāras he dates between 464 and 478 (Fig. 2).[21] Looking at Bāgh's vihāras, it is clear that its Cave 2 had walls decorated in a mode quite different than Ajaṇṭā's major caves. Here the painting was not figural or even narrative, but purely floral and decorative (Fig. 32). Portions of Bāgh's Cave 3 was also painted in a manner akin to that of Ajaṇṭā's Cave 20 (Fig. 33). Again, the painting inside Bāgh's Cave 4, like that inside Bāgh's Cave 2, displays floral and geometric motifs for the most part, with no apparent narrative scenes. In Cave 4, however, there appears to have been some figural imagery as well. On the wall between cells L5 and L6 one finds painted a standing haloed figure (Fig. 34), which I suppose had a *jaṭā-mukuṭa* as is often found on Ajaṇṭā's images of ascetics and bodhisattvas. Similarly next to cell L5, facing L6, there appears to be an image of a seated Buddha, suggested by faint traces of a squat white figure overhung by a parasol in front of which hang flower garlands. The third and final figure I found in Cave 4 at Bāgh is to the immediate left of cell L7. Standing and

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[20] Horner. *Cullavagga,* 213.

[21] See Walter Spink. "Bāgh: A Study," *Archives of Asian Art.* 30 (1976/77): 143-69, and Walter Spink. "The Vākāṭaka's Flowering and Fall." In *The Art of Ajanta.* Ed. by Ratan Parimoo et. al. (New Delhi: Books and Books, 1991): 78.

haloed, it wears a crown. Although this figure is a mere shadow, and I cannot ascertain the visual context, its body appears to face towards the cave's front, while its head is turned, looking towards the doorway to cell L7 behind it. These latter two figures were too faint for me to photograph. The only narrative scene I know of from Bāgh was painted on the exterior wall connecting Caves 4 and 5. Reproductions of this mural show that it rivaled those from Ajaṇṭā for quality and beauty.[22] Vogel suggests it depicted an unidentified *avadāna* or *jātakā* tale.[23] Unfortunately, this painting is now completely lost.

Surely, even given the few figures in Bāgh's Cave 4, it would seem that a vastly different sensibility of what could function as appropriate decorative motifs for Buddhist vihāras functioned at Bāgh and Ajaṇṭā, although both sites may have used many of the same workmen at about the same time. Accordingly, Bāgh serves as an ideal control for determining the parameters of Ajaṇṭā's own architectural and decorative schemes; differences between the two sites' paintings can here be attributed to the desires of patrons alone. This, of course, does not mean that vinaya considerations alone guided Ajaṇṭā's and Bāgh's patrons' choice of subjects. For further comparison one might refer to H. Sarkar's investigation of the monasteries of Taxila and Nāgārjunakoṇḍa.[24] This is the only serious study with which I am familiar that attempts to index monastic architectures and ritual spaces to specific *nikāyas*.

To recap the discussion up to this point: Attempting to determine how one might recover Ajaṇṭā's saṅgha, I began with a definition of the Buddhist saṅgha as a corpus of monks. This was too overly broad a definition, and the bulk of this section explored ways in which to circumscribe it. One delimitation is a distinction drawn between resident and

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[22] John Marshall, et. al. *The Bagh Caves.* (Delhi: Swati Publications, 1982): plate 19.

[23] Marshall. *The Bagh Caves,* 46.

[24] H. Sarkar. *Studies in Early Buddhist Architecture of India.* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1966).

non-resident monks at a monastery; a second distinction having bearing for Ajaṇṭā is that between members of different *nikāyas*. These distinctions are important and problematic for Ajaṇṭā for the following reasons. First, because there is a normative precept found throughout Buddhist literature on monastic practices, which holds that a saṅgha must be both unitary and unanimous when it performs ritual actions; second because before a saṅgha can be unified, its members must first agree upon specific geographical boundaries, separating that particular saṅgha from all others; and third, because we cannot determine where these boundaries would have been at Ajaṇṭā. Accordingly, we cannot determine how many saṅghas were in fact residing on this slope over the Waghora river. And we cannot necessarily rely upon information from Buddhist literature for assistance, because historical and material circumstances might have had as much influence upon the caves' architectural and decorative schemes as did stipulations in the vinaya. Although this would be a valuable study to pursue further, perchance to solve, in this dissertation I have opted for breadth over intensive depth. We must move on.

Patronage and Community in the Configuration of Ritual Space

The above discussion drew largely upon the MSV's *Poṣadhavastu*, a principal locus for instructions concerning the formation of local saṅghas for the performance of monastic rituals. This examination of monastic unity left aside all consideration of the *Poṣadha* ceremony itself. I wish now to turn to the *Poṣadha* as a transition to this new discussion wherein I explore the formation of Ajaṇṭā's saṅgha in the interaction between patrons and patronized.

Let us begin with the tale of the *Poṣadha* ceremony's introduction as a Buddhist practice, paraphrasing the MSV: Every day the *upāsakas* of Rājagṛha would go to the Buddha and his monks for teachings and to attend upon them. One morning, thinking

they were too early and that the Buddha would still be cloistered, Rājagṛha's *upāsakas* went to a park. There Buddha's devotees overheard teachers from other sects discussing sitting meditation, monastic concordance, and the *Poṣadha*; the *upāsakas* discovered that *tīrthikas* have knowledge of these three practices, but that Śākyamuni's monks do not. The *upāsakas* of Rājagṛha then left this park and visited the Buddha. They recounted what they heard from these *tīrthikas,* and requested that Buddha instruct his monks in the *Poṣadha* ceremony. Śākyamuni agrees, declaring that henceforth monks should observe the *Poṣadha.*[25]

The Buddha's monks were not familiar with *Poṣadha,* so they asked what it is and how to practice it. The MSV's answer: *Poṣadha* occurs on the half-month, at which time monks recite the *prātimokṣa sūtra.*[26] S. Dutt has suggested that *prātimokṣa* "etymologically means 'bond,'"[27] and in its most primitive form, this ritual was "a symbolical expression of

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[25] *bhagavān rājagṛhe viharati veluvane kalandakanivāpe | tena khalu samayena rājagṛhīyakā upāsakāḥ divādivam evodyuktā abhūvan bhagavantaṃ darśanāyopasaṃkramituṃ paryupāsanāyai | atha rājagṛhīyakānām upāsakānām etad abhavat | atiprātas tāvad asmākaṃ bhagavantaṃ darśanāyopasaṃkramituṃ paryupāsanāyai | pratisaṃlīno bhagavān pratisaṃlīnāś ca manobhāvanīyāś ca bhikṣavo yan nu vayaṃ yenānyatīrthikaparivrājakānām ārāmas tenopasaṃkramema | atha saṃbahulā rājagṛhīyakā upāsakā yenānyatīrthikaparivrājakānām ārāmas tenopasaṃkrāntāḥ | upasaṃkramyānyatīthikaparivrājakaiḥ sārdhaṃ saṃmukhaṃ saṃmodanīṃ saṃrañjanīṃ vividhāṃ kathāṃ vyatisāryaikānte niṣaṇṇāḥ | athānyatamas tīrthyān idam avocat | kin nu bhavatām eva niṣadyā kriyā poṣadhaś ca prajñāyate | āhosvit śramaṇānām api śākyaputrīyānām | athānyatamas tīrthyas tīrthyān idam avocat | asmākam eva bhavanto niṣadyā kriyā poṣadhaś ca prajñāyate na tv eva śramaṇānāṃ śākyaputrīyāṇāṃ | atha saṃbahulā rājagṛhīyakā upāsakāḥ saṃbahulānām anyatīrthikaparivrājakānāṃ bhāṣitaṃ nābhinandanti na pratikrośanti | anabhinandyāpratikrośya utthāyāsanebhyaḥ prakrāntāḥ | te yena bhagavāṃs tenopasaṃkrāntāḥ | upasaṃkramya bhagavataḥ pādau śirasā vanditvaikānte niṣaṇṇāḥ | ekāntaniṣaṇṇā rājagṛhīyakā upāsakā yāvān evaiṣām abhyu[pagamya] saṃbahulair anyatīrthikapravrājakaiḥ sārdham antarākathāsamudāhāras tat sarvaṃ bhagavato vistareṇāro-cayanti | evaṃ cāhuḥ | aho vata bhagavān asmākam api niṣadyāṃ kriyām poṣadhaṃ ca prajñāpayed anukampām upādāya | adhivāsayati bhagavān saṃbahulānāṃ [rājagṛhīyakānāṃ] tuṣṇīṃbhāvena | atha saṃbahulā rājagṛhīyakā upāsakā bhagavatas tūṣṇīṃbhāvenādhivāsanāṃ viditvā bhagavato bhāṣitam abhinandyānumodya bhagavato 'ntikāt prakrāntāḥ | tatra bhagavān bhikṣūn āmantrayate sma | tasmād anujānāmi bhikṣubhir adyāgreṇa niṣadyā kriyā poṣadhaś ca pratijāgartavyaḥ | uktaṃ ca bhagavatā | adyāgreṇa bhikṣubhir niṣadyā kriyā poṣadhaś ca pratijāgartavya iti* | Dutt. *Gilgit Manuscripts,* vol. 3.4, 71-2.

[26] Dutt. *Gilgit Manuscripts,* vol. 3.4, 80-81.

[27] Dutt. *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries*, 69.

the unity (*samaggatā*) of the *saṅgha*."[28] Whatever the 'primitive' significance of *prātimokṣa*, that meaning rapidly gave way before one in which the *prātimokṣa* became identified as a code of monastic rules (the MSV's "*prātimokṣa sūtra*"), and the *Poṣadha* ceremony became a gathering in which monks affirmed their own compliance with these rules of the order. Returning to *Poṣadha* as a ceremony symbolic of saṅghic unification however, it was not a means for unifying the saṅgha alone. The story that charters this ceremony is one in which the Buddhist laity, dissatisfied with its access to the Buddha and his monks, request a certain time be set aside for that access. As certainly as rehearsal of the *prātimokṣa* reaffirmed the saṅgha's internal unity -- a symbolism that remained even after it became a recitation of rules -- the *Poṣadha* may be viewed as a ceremony that unified the monks with the laity into a unified saṅgha, a Buddhist society broadly conceived.

Whereas the MSV does not elaborate upon the interactions between monks and the laity during this celebration, the *Abhisamācārikā* -- a vinaya text belonging to the Lokottaravāda division of the Mahāsāṃghika *nikāya*, one Sanskrit manuscript of which was preserved in Tibet -- offers interesting information vis-à-vis donor/saṅgha relations on the *Poṣadha* day. In point of fact, this text treats donors, called *dāyakadānapati*,[29] as an integral part of the *Poṣadha* ceremony. Here, beyond the monks' concordant recitation of the *prātimokṣa sūtra*, individuals monks were deputed to distribute ś*alākās* to resident and non-resident monks,[30] to collect the ś*alākās*, to give a religious discourse, to tell tales,

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[28] Dutt. *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries,* 67.

[29] Sanghasen Singh and Kenryo Minowa. "A Critical Edition and Translation of the *Abhisamācārikā Nāma Bhikṣuprakīrṇakaḥ* (Chapter One)," *Buddhist Studies* 12 (1988): 81.

[30] Ś*alākās* are "tally sticks" whereby monks are counted. Before a ceremony can be performed, all the monks present are given a ś*alākā,* these are then returned and counted. In this way, the monks can know if everyone who is resident at the monastery or visiting the monastery is accounted for and how many there were.

and to request a gift.[31] The recitation of a religious discourse and tales, as well, of course, as the requesting of a gift were moments in this monastic ritual that directly involved interaction between the monks and the laity.[32] At another point in this text we find an interesting passage describing donors who brought a religious gift on the occasion of the *Poṣadha* but refuse to give it because all the monks are not yet present; because they have work to perform, these donors do eventually capitulate and give the gift, although the saṅgha is still not whole; they leave annoyed.[33]

I relate these examples from the *Abhisamācārikā* because the *Poṣadha* ceremony one finds represented therein bears a remarkable resemblance to the *Poṣadha* ceremony as described by the seventh century traveller I-Tsing, whose account of this observance is the most complete we possess for ancient India. I-Tsing's observations, in turn, are valuable as an entre into the issue of patronage at Ajaṇṭā, for they describe the bringing together of Buddhist communities, lay and monastic, into a social whole. In fact, I-Tsing's description of the *Poṣadha* day makes no mention of the *prātimokṣa*. The celebration he recounts is that of a feast for the saṅgha, complete with dancing girls.

More to the point, in I-Tsing's telling, the *Poṣadha* observance focussed upon the ritual worship of the Buddha and other deities. This is witnessed in the very constitution of

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[31] *yo pratibalo bhavati so adhyeṣitavyo. Ayam sānaṃ śalākāṃ cāresi, tvam śalākāṃ praticchesi, tvam pratimokṣasūtram uddiśeṣi, tvam bhāsesi, tvam parikathām karesi, tvam dakṣiṇāṃ ādiśesi.* Singh and Minowa. *Abhisamācārikā,* 82.

[32] To be sure, monks too could play the role of *dāyakadānapati*, as one sees in I-Tsing (*Record,* 40). See Schopen ("Two Problems") on the lay/monk distinction and patronage.

[33] *Bhagavān Srāvastyām viharati Sāstā devānāñ ca manuṣyānāñ ca vistareṇa nidānam kṛtvā saṃghasya dāni poṣadho. Āyuṣmām Nandano saṃghasthaviro. Upanamdano dvitīyasthaviro. Saṃghasthaviro āgato. Bhikṣū āgatā. Dvitīyasthaviro nāgacchati. Dāyakadānapati dāni deyadharmāṇi ādāya pratipālenti. Samagram ca bhikṣusamgham vandiṣyāmaḥ. Deyadharmañ ca pratiṣṭhāpayiṣyāmo ti. Te dāni pṛcchanti, Ārya, samagro bhikṣusaṃgho. Āhaṃsu, nohetam dīrgāyū. Ko khalu nāgaccati. Āhaṃsu, dvitīyasthaviro nāgacchati. Te dāni ojjhāhyanti. Vayam pi karmāntāṃ choriya āgatā. Gacchāma. Samagrasya saṃghasya pādāṃ vandiṣyāmaḥ. Deyadharmañ ca pratiṣṭhāpayiṣyāmaḥ. Dvitīyasthaviro nāgacchati. Te dāni mūhūrttamātraṃ pratipāliya āsitvā deyadharmaṃ pratiṣṭhāpayitvā gatāḥ.* Singh and Minowa. *Abhisamācārikā,* 84.

sacred space for the ceremony: At the room's front was placed an offering for the arhats, and perhaps the Buddha and bodhisattvas; following that, the monks were seated a row in order of seniority;[34] and finally in the hall's recess, at the lowest end of the row, was placed an offering for the yakṣiṇī Hārītī.[35] This description of a seventh century *Poṣadha* hall is of great interest for this study of Ajaṇṭā. A consideration of this ritual space in the context of the social concerns it expresses can assist us in the interpretation of the social dimension of the ritual space constructed within Ajaṇṭā's Cave 2. The pattern described for Cave 2 may, in turn, assist us in understanding the ways in which the construction of Ajaṇṭā's caves as a whole also resulted in the construction of a 'Buddhist society.' This chain of interpretations takes its start from I-Tsing's notation that the *yakṣiṇī* Hārītī is included as a crucial participant in the *Poṣadha* ceremony. Before I explore her place at Ajaṇṭā, however, let us review I-Tsing's account.

After introducing Hārītī's liturgical location within the *Poṣadha* hall, I-Tsing gives a redaction of her history, which may be condensed as follows. As a result of a minor slight, a woman of Rājagṛha vowed that in her next life she would return as a demoness, and devour all the children in the city. Because of this vow, she was indeed reborn as a yakṣiṇī/demoness: Hārītī. She had 500 sons of her own, but every day she ate several children belonging to the city's human matrons. The people called upon the Buddha for assistance. To tame Hārītī, the Buddha then stole the youngest of her sons, her most beloved, and hid the young demon in his bowl. Hārītī came angrily to the Buddha, demanding her son's return. As befits a moral exemplum, the Buddha called Hārītī's attention to her new-found empathy for the heartache of Rājagṛha's mothers, observing

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[34] The *Abhisamācārikā* (Singh and Minowa, 99) adds an interesting tidbit on this point. The auspiciousness of the occasion on account of which a donor invites the monks for a meal, such as a birth or death in the family, determines where the monks will sit: If they have been invited for an auspicious occasion, they sit on the right side; if inauspicious, on the left.

[35] I-Tsing. *Record of the Buddhist Religion*, 35-7.

that if Hārītī felt so strongly about losing one of her 500 sons, how much more so must human mothers feel about losing their only children to sate Hārītī's blood lust. Chastened, Hārītī agreed to forgo human flesh. She became a lay-follower. To replace her awful diet, the Buddha charged the monks to make daily offerings of food to Hārītī and her sons. For this reason, according to I-Tsing, the image of Hārītī is found either in the porch or in a corner of the dining-hall of all Indian monasteries depicting her as holding a babe in her arms, and three or five children around her knees.

I relate the story of this dread demoness because a shrine was dedicated to her at Ajaṇṭā (Fig. 35). This shrine, fronted by pillars (an architectural device denoting sacrality), was excavated into the rear wall of Cave 2. It is one of two subsidiary chapels within the vihāra, located on either side of the Buddha shrine's antechamber (Fig 36). To the right of the Buddha, the Hārītī shrine holds monolithic carved images of Hārītī and her consort Pañcika on its back wall (Fig. 37). Murals depicting devotees performing pūjā were painted on its side walls (Figs. 43, 45). Balancing Hārītī's shrine, to the antechamber's left, is a chapel holding monolithic images of Padmanidhi and Śaṅkhanidhi, embodiments of the wealth and power controlled by Pañcika (Fig. 39). These are the only two chapels excavated *within* an Ajaṇṭā vihāra as part of an original patron's program dedicated to 'deities' other than the Buddha.

Significantly, two small tableaus were carved in the upper corners of the Hārītī shrine's rear wall, each of which depicts one of the pivotal moments in Hārītī's conversion. In the upper right we see Hārītī enraged, confronting the Buddha (Fig. 41); at the left is Hārītī and the dear son she 'rescued' taking refuge in the Buddha (Fig. 42). Not only does this chapel confirm I-Tsing's observation of the importance of the mother of demons within monastic architecture, but the narrative depicted at Ajaṇṭā coincides with the tale I-Tsing tells. Indeed, of the many examples available, I have chosen this one from I-Tsing,

for it is not merely about conversion or the pacification of disease. Rather, focussing upon Hārītī, I-Tsing tells of patronage and the formation of societies; he tells of the Buddhist saṅgha as a recipient of alms and giver of boons. The pattern of patronage involved in the Hārītī shrine's creation may serve as a model for the site as a whole.

Yazdani observed that the figures of yakṣas contained in Cave 2's chapels were designed with a feeling of reverence akin to that shown in the carving of the figure of Buddha himself, this cave's cultic center.[36] One basis for such reverence would have been Hārītī's ability to pacify disease, whose demonic etiology is well known to all strata of Indian literature. In the same tenor, I-Tsing tells that Hārītī will grant children and riches to her devotees. But to tie this story to Ajaṇṭā's formation, I will focus upon an alternate affective structure. That is, beyond being a practice for maintaining health, this daily offering brings us to the heart of the saṅgha's social role.

Recall, in I-Tsing's telling of Hārītī's history, it is not the monks who were afflicted by disease, but the children of Rājagṛha. By fulfilling the obligation to feed Hārītī, the monks appropriate for themselves a distinct institutional role in Indian society. In Michael Carrithers felicitous phrase, this monastic ritual works to "domesticate" the saṅgha. Carrithers has introduced domestication as the "fundamental" issue of Buddhist sociology. But I will instead build upon the work of another sociologist, Ivan Strenski, who presents domestication as an ongoing process through which the saṅgha participated in dynamic social relations. In brief, Strenski shows that points of institutional contact between saṅgha and society -- involvements of a residential, ritual, social, political, and economic nature -- may be explained through an account of domestication based upon the institution of *gift exchange*. "Above all," Strenski writes, "the *sangha* is a ritual receiver of gifts."[37] This is the

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[36] Ghulam Yazdani. *Ajanta*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1930-55): vol. 2, 2.

[37] Ivan Strenski. "On Generalized Exchange and the Domestication of the *Sangha*," *Man*. 18 (1983): 465.

case if we ask about the coalescence of a saṅgha for the sake of attending an *Poṣadha* ceremony of the sort I-Tsing describes, and it is the case if we ask about the formation of a Buddhist community at Ajaṇṭā. Based upon this primary understanding of the saṅgha's social role, Strenski formulates the question of the saṅgha's domestication, to be: how was Buddhist society formed in the process of ritual giving?

As an answer, he analyzes the web of relations within which these interchanges took place into two basic modes: Restricted Exchange and Generalized Exchange. Restricted exchange involves what may be called a commercial element: two parties contract an equitable exchange of goods or services on a reciprocal basis. In relation to Hārītī, the dynamic of restricted exchange is clear: Buddhists feed her, she does not eat local babies. Generalized exchange, by contrast, is not linear, but complex, in its configuration. In Strenski's words, generalized exchange "seeks an unbalanced condition between exchange partners, which requires repayment at some unspecified time, typically by another group or person than the original receiver of the first gift: A gives to B who gives to C . . . until A finally receives his due. . . . Generalized exchange links its members in a theoretically open system of indebtedness, the momentum of which tends to build up social solidarity."[38] Accordingly, Strenski parses the term 'domestication' as "the condition of the *sangha* within a system of generalized exchange. 'Domestication' simply names a process of the *sangha's* participation in a certain social solidarity."[39] For my purposes, this analysis translates into the following question: how did the evident relation of restricted exchange between Buddhists and Hārītī contribute to the saṅgha's domestication, its socialization within the cycles of generalized exchange? And more importantly, can this pattern of exchange relations aid us in understanding the formation of Ajaṇṭā?

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[38] Strenski. "On Generalized Exchange," 471.

[39] Strenski. "On Generalized Exchange," 471.

Here I wish to call again upon the work of Jonathan Z. Smith, in particular his crucial observation that "ritual is a way of performing the ways things ought to be in conscious tension to the way things are."[40] This might be reformulated as, ritual is life lived in the subjunctive mood. In explaining the mechanisms through which ritual directs attention towards and resolves conceptual and existential incongruities, Smith valorizes *place* as a fundamental component of ritual: the establishment of ritual space initiates this process of differentiation, by clearly demarcating an area apart, drawing attention to difference. In Smith's words, "within the temple, the ordinary becomes significant, becomes 'sacred,' simply by being there. . . . Sacrality is above all a category of emplacement."[41]

The previous section's discussion concerning the setting of a *sīmā* as a prerequisite for the performance of Buddhist monastic rituals can be understood within this rubric. Moreover, this more recent discussion has introduced two maps of the space within which Hārītī's feeding took place, and two ritual contexts. The first was the *Poṣadha* hall; the second Ajaṇṭā's Cave 2. The first involved a cycle of exchange wherein monks functioned primarily as recipients; in the second, they were themselves givers. In the first, the monks were domesticated by their supporters, I use the passive voice; in the second, the monks actively performed the work of domestication upon themselves. I would, in fact, suggest that these two rituals may be viewed as complementary within the structure of generalized exchange. In both cases, a rite based upon the dynamic of restricted exchange on the part of the giver resulted in the saṅgha's social emplacement. Both *Poṣadha* and the daily feeding of Hārītī were not rituals that merely *involved* giving; they were instead performative moments that created hierarchies of the sacred, analogically expressed by the

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[40] Jonathan Z. Smith. *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987): 109.

[41] Smith. *To Take Place*, 104.

spatial dynamics instituted for the rite. And it was the saṅgha's role in the creation and elaboration of these sacral hierarchies -- both as recipient and as giver -- that was the basis of its domestication.

During the *Poṣadha* ceremony, Hārītī was mapped as the sacred opposite of the Buddha, bodhisattvas or arhats, who were placed at the *Poṣadha* hall's front. Together with these epitomes of Dharma, she functioned to bracket the ritual space. Placed between these antipodes, the monks were defined spatially as mediators between transcendental and chthonic powers, between the Buddhist ideal and the all-too socially real. A patron's performance of this ceremony would have established the Buddhist saṅgha as a ritual entity whose presence pacified the worst horrors and simultaneously promised the highest good; through the saṅgha, everyday life was able to coexist with the subjunctive life of ritual space. Returning to Strenski's observations, in the *Poṣadha* rite one finds an act of restricted exchange between donor and Hārītī bestowed upon the saṅgha a fundamental role in the generalized cycle of social exchange. Like the ideal figures -- Buddha, arhat, bodhisattva -- who received offerings at an *Poṣadha* hall's other end, Hārītī served as the condition of possibility of the saṅgha's domestication: one chaos that made acts of ordering, such as the *Poṣadha* meal, not only possible, but also necessary.

The geography of ritual in Ajaṇṭā's Cave 2 is clearly not homologous to that of the *Poṣadha* hall. In the latter, sacrality was constructed through the binary opposition of potential harm and potential perfection, a space mediated by the saṅgha. In Cave 2, a binary opposition does not obtain, but a complementarity between the figures in the side chapels and the central Buddha. Treating this cave's space as a programmatic whole, one finds that no matter what the order or direction of approach a devotee may have taken to the various icons, the spatially central Buddha never lost its ritual centrality. Here the yakṣas and yakṣiṇī in the side chapels do not bracket the space so as to delimit a dualist

cosmology. Instead this configuration suggests a continuous, perhaps functional, hierarchy of sacrality. Granted, Hārītī's occasional demonic nature was recollected for the worshipper in the little carvings behind her monolithic image. Nevertheless, as a presence she is regal, maternal, and eminently approachable. She is in the Buddha's sphere, and portrayed *as if* the monks living at this site have maintained the diurnal duties to her and her sons set upon them by the Buddha: her icon is the ever-present and unchanging sign of the Buddha's power and the saṅgha's performative success. Of course, to invoke Smith again, this incongruity between the ever-certain knowledge that Hārītī is potentially deadly and the never-changing portrayal of her as benign is the very basis of ritual. The fact that Ajaṇṭā's monks would have placated Hārītī who was represented as a sweetly maternal figure itself bespeaks an awareness of her ever present demonic appetites, which would return in the absence of the Buddhist control mechanisms.

And there is more. Cave 2's Hārītī shrine is the best preserved space of its sort in India. Not only has the image come to us virtually intact, and not only has its place within a broader spatial context been retained, but this shrine is singular in that the paintings on its walls are also preserved. By all accounts, they stand as some of the finest work coming from a site known for the quality of its work. Let us look at these paintings, for they tell the story of the saṅgha's domestication.

The right wall of the chapel (Fig. 43) presents a scene in which women and their children bear offerings to Hārītī, lay them in a pile before her, and then proceed to pay homage at her feet. Although there is a feeling of narrative continuity between the sculptured figures and those painted next to them on the wall, there is an artistic discrepancy. The sculpted figures are hard not in substance alone, but also in spirit: they maintain a quasi-iconographic stoniness absent from the painted figures, which are mannered, yet naturally individual. This dynamic interplay of formal and informal figures

within a continuing narrative sequence is particularly evoked by the nonchalance with which a languid painted *chaurī*-bearer seems about to step into the sculpture and take the place of the stolid stone attendant at Pañcika's side. Another character painted in this mode is in the background closer than this *chaurī*-bearer to the sculpture: bejeweled, sitting serenely in the position of royal ease upon a rug, he holds a white lotus in his right hand and gazes devotedly at Hārītī and Pañcika, while the rocks behind him form a natural body-halo (Fig. 44). Interestingly, although the *chaurī*-bearer clearly approaches the sculpture, by flattening the perspective one can create a curious ambiguity as to whose attendant she really is. Scholars have sometimes identified this seated figure as the bodhisattva Padmapāṇi. This may be so. But he may also be a renowned member of the royal family, or more-likely a conflated figure suggesting a king-as-bodhisattva or prince-as-bodhisattva. In either event, he is a figure of no small authority, and through his worshipful attitude he lends legitimacy to the goings-on in the shrine.

Art historians have assumed that the left wall of this chapel (Fig. 45) depicts roughly the same activities as those on the right. However, there is no sense of the direct interplay between it and the sculpted figures so important for the right wall's interpretation. Rather, breaking the flow of action towards the chapel's rear, and parallel to the right wall's so-called Padmapāṇi, is one disrespectful woman facing away from the sculpted image of Hārītī, looking out from the shrine just as Hārītī does (Fig. 46). Unlike the other figures in these murals, this woman's hands appear to be held in *mudrās* characteristic of a divinity rather than a devotee: her right hand suggests the *varada-mudrā*, the gesture of gift giving: the fact that it is also holding a child suggests the giving of children; her left hand is in the *śrī-mudrā*, signifying good fortune, wealth, and royalty, formed by the joining of the ring-finger and thumb. The frieze's composition also sets this woman apart. By placing her to the extreme right of the group of four votaries -- all of

whom appear to be in attendance upon her, though in informal poses -- the artist highlights her position as the focus of the scene. The sense that she is the center of attention is augmented by the placement of a stylized mountain scarp directly to her right: she becomes impassable, the action of this scene having no other direction than towards herself. Finally, she has two children with her, also heading away from the sculptural group. Is it not possible that this figure is Hārītī herself, slimmed and beautified in accord with the mannered naturalism of these friezes, come to speak with her devotees?

If this figure is Hārītī, then there is not a spatial but a temporal continuity between the scenes on the right and left walls of this chapel. The right wall depicts the performance of a *pūjā*; thus the painted figures proceed towards those in stone. The left wall portrays the desired outcome of that *pūjā*, in which the great *yakṣiṇī* Hārītī grants her devotees *darśan* and satisfies their hopes and desires in accord with their petitions.

The fact that these images of lay folk performing a ritual to Hārītī grace a shrine in which the monks would have actually performed rituals to her encapsulates in living color the monastic Hārītī 'cult' as it worked at the levels of restricted and generalized exchange. The saṅgha and the yakṣiṇī have a relationship based upon restricted exchange -- the saṅgha feeds Hārītī, she does not feast upon human babies. And this introduces the saṅgha into the generalized exchange structures of Indian society. That is, without recompensing society for any specific offerings it provides, this monastic ritual offers security, health, babies, ample crops, and so on to whoever might benefit, regardless of that individual's personal relationship with the saṅgha. Recall Smith's statement that ritual draws attention to difference, presenting ideality in conscious tension to reality. All the representations in this shrine conjure such a scene: a placid Hārītī whose potential violence is ever recollected in stone, is set in the context of an idealized ritual, the subjunctive realization of the monks' daily feeding. Of course, the exchange is not unidirectional. Whatever

protection a particular saṅgha may offer to its surrounding community will be contingent upon that saṅgha's integrity being maintained through its reception of alms. The saṅgha requires habitations and support to function within this cycle. Cave 2 itself, a monastic dwelling, may be viewed as a particularly explicit trace of this web of exchange relationships.

As this system worked on the level of the general laity, so one may observe that the political economy too was supported within this process. According to the classical literature on Indian kingship, the king serves as an intermediary between the powers of nature and society; he is an essential factor for the well-being of the people. A good king blesses his subjects, a bad king destroys them, by allowing drought, disease, and war to afflict his population.[42] More to the point, verses from the Maitrībala jātaka in Ārya Śūra's *Jātakamālā* were inscribed in Ajaṇṭā's Cave 2 (app. A, Nos. 7-8); and from this story we learn that ogres, goblins, and imps who feed on human flesh and fat have no power in a realm ruled by the righteous king, whose rule accords with the Dharma.[43] If one will remember the Maitrībāla story: a group of five demons request a righteous king to feed them with his own body, since they are unable to attack or devour any beings living within his territory's boundaries. And so, through the mechanism of a restricted exchange with Hārītī, the saṅgha enters into a generalized exchange relationship with the King: by pacifying this and other demons, the saṅgha functionally supplements the king's own royal majesty which is supposed to keep demons at bay. Clearly the Hārītī ritual also works within the conceptual space usually delimited by the term 'legitimation:' it provides a means for controlling a perceived precariousness of the social and cosmic orders that simultaneously reinforces the symbolic and coercive authorities of the reigning king.

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[42] Jan Gonda. *Ancient Indian Kingship from the Religious Point of View*. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966).

[43] Peter Khoroche (trans). *Once the Buddha was a Monkey: Ārya Śūra's Jātakamālā*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989): 48.

Indeed, the painted images from this Hārītī shrine place it clearly within a royal milieu: the princely figure benignly approving the proceedings, the decrepit attendant of the main celebrant, and her regal bejeweled form all bespeak royalty. Spink has argued that Cave 1 at Ajaṇṭā was the donation of Vākāṭaka King Hariṣeṇa;[44] and that Cave 2, the cave in which this Hārītī shrine is located, may have been patronized by one of Hariṣeṇa's wives (personal communication). Among the many details which led Spink to link these two caves is that the capital on the left peristyle's second pillar holds the same sculpted iconic group as that found in the Hārītī chapel: Hārītī and Pañcika, with an unidentified girl holding a parrot in her left hand a lotus in her right standing between them (Fig. 38); the capital on the third pillar in Cave 1 displays Śaṅkhanidhi and Padmanidhi, paralleling the main figures in the Cave 2's pillared shrine to the left of the Buddha chapel (Fig. 40). Although some other caves at Ajaṇṭā have images of Hārītī et. al., only Caves 1 and 2 display these figures in these precise iconic groupings, and both do so within the inner hall.

Spink's association of both caves with the region's ruling family is particularly suggestive for our consideration of Hārītī and the patronage of her shrine. As one will recall from the first chapter, the Vākāṭaka royal family had two branches, the Vatsagulma and Nandivardhana. Their common ancestor was the greatest Vākāṭaka emperor of all, the third century Samrāṭ Pravarasena (cf. Fig. 6). And as one will recall from my reconstruction of Ajaṇṭā's history, Vākāṭaka land-grants typically begin by recounting the grantor's genealogy. Within genealogical lists, Pravarasena is praised by kings from both Vākāṭaka branches for having performed numerous sacrifices etc. But there is one significant

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[44] Walter M. Spink. "Ajaṇṭā's Chronology: Politics and Patronage" In *Kalādarśana*. Ed. by Joanna G. Williams. (New Delhi: Oxford and IBH Publishing in collaboration with the American Institute of Indian Studies, 1981): 109-126; Walter M. Spink. "Ajaṇṭā's Chronology: Cave 1's Patronage and Related Problems." In *Chhavi-2* (=Rai Krishnadasa Festschrift). (Benares: Bharat Kala Bhavan, 1981): 144-155.

difference between the praise for Pravarasena found within Vatsagulma inscriptions and those belonging to the Nandivardhana. Namely, Hariṣeṇa's branch of the Vākāṭaka family, and only Hariṣeṇa's branch, bestowed the epithet *Hārītīputra* upon this common forbearer.[45] *Hārītīputra* translates literally as "the son of Hārītī." In short, one way Hariṣeṇa and his fathers set themselves off from their cousins though their claim of descent from the yakṣiṇī Hārītī.

The precise significance of *Hārītīputra* is unknown. It is also found within the records of other dynasties contemporary with the Vākāṭakas. Mirashi observes that "in later records Hārīti is represented as a sage."[46] In the case of the Vākāṭaka records, however, *Hārītī* is definitely feminine. If the Hārītī referred to therein is indeed this Buddhist *yakṣiṇī*, it might suggest military prowess, as Hārītī's 500 sons formed the bulwark of the *yakṣa* army. Whatever *Hārītīputra's* precise significance, no female figure named Hārītī is definitively identified from this period other than the Buddhist *yakṣiṇī*. Accordingly, a monastic ritual for Hārītī at Ajaṇṭā may not have merely introduced the saṅgha into a generalized, structural system of exchange and political legitimation, but may have explicitly reinforced whatever claims Hariṣeṇa's particular family could have made based upon its claim of descent from this emblematic ancestress. Here the distinction between restricted and generalized patterns of exchange would be conflated, with the result that Ajaṇṭā's saṅgha, located at this kingdom's geographical periphery, may have straddled that interval in direct service to king Hariṣeṇa's political center.

The Hārītī icon's position within Cave 2 signals her domestication on two levels: literally brought into the Buddhist house, Hārītī is tamed in perpetuity. A member of the

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[45] Vasudev Vishnu Mirashi. *The Inscriptions of the Vākāṭakas*. Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, volume V. (Oocatamund: Government Epigraphist for India, 1963): 96, line 3; Krishna Mohan Shrimali. *Agrarian Structure in Central India and the Northern Deccan (c. AD 300-500): A Study in Vākāṭaka Inscriptions*. (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1987): 82, line 5.

[46] Mirashi. *Inscriptions of the Vākāṭakas*, 98, n. 12.

royal family may have provided the physical space within which that domestication was maintained; that same queen may have emplaced the monastic ritual within a visual environment dominated by an image of herself paying homage to her and/or her royal husband's demonic foremother. Such ritual emplacement may well encapsulate the saṅgha's location within Vākāṭaka society. By performing daily devotions to Hārītī within an explicitly royal context, the saṅgha, though at a remove from the palace, would have participated in the palace's, and Vākāṭaka society's, most intimate workings. By bringing the palace to the monastery through the representations on this shrine's walls, the monks' good effects returned to the palace and the society for which it was responsible.

Interlude: A Reaffirmation of Vākāṭaka Control over Ajaṇṭā

Generalizing these observations about the patronage involved in the creation of Cave Two's Hārītī shrine, one is left with a broad range of questions the answers to which will set the parameters for ascertaining the generalized exchange relationships responsible for Ajaṇṭā as a whole. Who were the patrons? Who were the recipients? Why did these individuals participate in this project? What were the limits of their participation? It should be clear from my discussion of the Hārītī shrine that by treating patronage as a sub-species of generalized exchange, one must forswear an expectation of complete elucidation of these questions. As Barbara Stoler Miller and Richard Eaton observe, patronage is "a multi-dimensional, sometimes loosely codified network of exchanges involving not only the production of art and literature, but also its performance, transmission, reinterpretation, and preservation . . . Patronage networks in India, as elsewhere, lie embedded in particular socio-political systems which in turn rest in deeply pervasive and culturally

patterned conceptions of power and authority."[47] The complex diversity of social institutions that could ramify upon the performance of patronage combined with the general lack of available evidence and the semiotic nature of the evidence that we do have will necessarily leave this examination incomplete.

Nevertheless, there can be little doubt that the social geographies of fifth-century India did play their role in shaping Ajaṇṭā's religious landscape. Although this study separates the religious dimension out for special consideration, Ajaṇṭā's Three Jewels, beginning with its saṅgha, were integrally woven into the fabric of fifth-century Vākāṭaka society. The above discussion of the Hārītī chapel, as well as Spink's chronology, have made explicit a conception of patronage at Ajaṇṭā that binds these caves explicitly to the social programme of the Vākāṭaka polity. In fact, Spink holds that the work was more or less orchestrated from the Vākāṭaka capital, where architects and artisans were hired by "a consortium of the emperor's richest and most powerful courtiers."[48] He envisions the site being micro-managed by a strong-handed bureaucracy whose authority reached so far that, as political pressures threatened to break-off the excavatory work, that absentee administration could decree which "few privileged donors . . . [would be] *allowed* to rush their images . . . to completion,"[49] and which hapless donors would be forbidden from quickly finishing their images thus.

Spink's interpretation of the evidence may be a bit overblown here. Yet, there are numerous examples of mistakes at the caves which only make sense if executive control over decoration or excavation was not held on site. The Cave 17 Wheel of Existence

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[47] Barabara Stoler Miller and Richard Eaton. "Introduction." In *The Powers of Art: Patronage in Indian Culture*. Ed. by Barbara Stoler Miller. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992): 3-4.

[48] Walter Spink. "The Archaeology of Ajaṇṭā," *Ars Orientalis*. 21 (1992): 69.

[49] Walter Spink. "The Earliest Vakataka Cave Shrine: An Anomalous Stupa in the Ghatotkaca Vihara." In *M.S. Nagaraja Rao Commemoration Volume*. Forthcoming.

discussed in the previous chapter can serve as an example. In the previous chapter I explained how this Wheel was likely a complete circle, and not a pie with a wedge cut out as Schlingloff hypothesizes. Yet the question remains, why was the circle too large for the space in the first place? Why did the top of the cell door have to be filled in order to accommodate the Wheel? The answer comes in two parts. First, Spink has shown that Cave 17's side porch doors were late additions to this cave's plan, for the placement of the left cell door is anomalous and unique at the site in that it is off-center. As Spink writes, "it is off center simply because the porch-end cells had not been conceived when Cave 17's porch was excavated; consequently, the nearby cistern ("Cave 18"), dug early as always, had intruded into this area. When the cell was finally added, the door was centered in relation to the cell, rather than the porch wall, to better allow space for the conventional placement of beds along the cell's left and right sides."[50] Second, assuming that the Wheel of Existence was part of the decorative plan from the beginning, Spink further reasons that this "complex and learned decorative program was conceived 'back in the capital.'"[51] Because of mis-communication or lack of communication between the site and the capital, however, the Wheel was not down-sized to accommodate this architectural element. "The wheel was laid out as large as possible and the 'official' orders for its design and execution transmitted to the humble workers at the site, who then coped as best as they could, but in somewhat the way as the village tailor, told to copy a shirt exactly, delivers the finished duplicate just as ordered, and with the same tear in the sleeve."[52] Indeed, a second anomaly of this door way is that it is not of the same height as that on the right side of the porch, but 8-9 inches lower. This suggests that when the doorway was cut, "the problem to

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[50] Walter Spink. "A Scholar's Guide to the Ajaṇṭā Caves." Unpublished typescript.

[51] Spink. "A Scholar's Guide"

[52] Spink. "A Scholar's Guide"

be created by the Wheel of Life was already realized, but if so the adjustment made was not enough."[53]

Whether the artist who designed Cave 17's Wheel of Existence was a monk, a professional artisan, or the patron-king himself, Spink's knotting of this icon within a web of extra-iconic contexts and contingencies has broader implications for patronage at the site as a whole. Here the icon was preserved according to plan. In some cases even strongly established iconographic motifs had to give way before contingencies; as when a standing Buddha carved on the left wall of Cave Upper 6's Buddha shrine was carved with his *left hand* in the gesture of giving because the sculptor had not left sufficient room to use the customary right hand. In today's India, using the left hand for giving to others would be considered impolite, even insulting. This etiquette may have been in force in the fifth century, for this anomalous Buddha's left hand is turned inward, a second anomaly.

As these icons and images were inextricably set within a physical matrix, so Buddhism's Three Jewels -- here focussing on its saṅgha -- seems to have been knotted within a web of extra-Buddhist assumptions and expectations. At this point it would be valuable to investigate all the donors at the site, to determine their social status; to assess their familiarity with Buddhist and Hindu lore, mythology, and doctrine; to analyze their actions in light of normative prescriptions for people of their status; to review which canons they personally accepted, encoded in the artifacts they left behind. Time and patience not being infinite, however, the remainder of this chapter will only attempt to lay down the fundamentals for this broader study of Ajaṇṭā's saṅgha within its social and cultural contexts by means of a census of the patrons responsible for work at the site.

A Census of Ajaṇṭā's Patrons

[53] Spink. "A Scholar's Guide"

In my discussion of literary sources available for the study of Ajaṇṭā, I noted that the site boasts a total of ninety-seven inscriptions, sixty-one of which may be classified as donative records from the Vākāṭaka period (Fig. 47). Following Spink's chronology, we can further analyze these into programmatic and intrusive donative inscriptions. The former group is comprised of five records: the long verses incised on the porches of Caves 16, 17, and 26, a brief, formulaic inscription cut into the stone on the pedestal beneath the main Buddha image in Cave 4, and a very fragmentary record found on the left pilaster on the porch of Cave 20. The remaining fifty-six donative records may be placed in Ajaṇṭā's intrusive phase. Of these, 36 were made by monks, 7 by lay disciples, and the remaining 14 are of indeterminate origin. In the following pages I offer a brief overview of these groups.

Programmatic Donors

Turning first to Ajaṇṭā's programmatic donors, we find that this group presents a rather unified face, both sociologically and in terms of broad doctrinal associations. In the chapter on Ajaṇṭā's chronology, I already introduced the donors of Caves 16 and 17, both of whom were directly involved in the Vākāṭaka polity: Cave 16's donor Varāhadeva was King Hariṣeṇa's minister, Cave 17's was Hariṣeṇa's feudatory. In fact, as I mentioned in the first chapter, Caves 17, 18, 19 and 20 are widely regarded as a complex of caves that were all the work of that same Vākāṭaka feudatory.[54]

The Cave 19 attribution is fairly certain, based upon Cave 17's verse 27, wherein Cave 17's donor claims to have "commissioned an extensive *gandhakuṭī* in another section

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[54] On this point see, for example, Spink. "Archaeology of Ajaṇṭā," 76; Karl Khandalavala. "The History and Dating of the Mahayana Caves of Ajanta," *Pathik*. 2 (1990): 21; Chandrashekar Gupta. "The Authorship of Ajanta Caves 17 to 20." In *The Art of Ajanta*. Ed by Ratan Parimoo et. al. (New Delhi: Books and Books, 1991): 100-104. Spink alone adds Cave 29 to this list, and he has only done so orally.

of this [monastic complex], to the West." The *gandhakuṭī*, literally perfumed hall, was originally the name of the Buddha's personal residence at Jetavana, Anāthapiṇḍada's monastery in Śrāvastī, but came to be identified with the central shrine of any monastery.[55] As such, the Buddha shrine at the rear of this vihāra might well be called its *gandhakuṭī*. This placement for the *gandhakuṭī* would be further supported by the vinaya of the Mūlasarvāstivāda sect of Buddhism, which describes the following basic floor-plan for monasteries of that sect:

> The Blessed One said, 'If you have three cells made, a *gandhakuṭi* should be placed in the middle and two cells on the two sides. Thus in a structure with three walls, there are nine cells. In a four walled structure, the *gandhakuṭi* [should] face a door-way in the center [of the wall opposite it]; and two cells [are to be placed] on the sides of the door-way.[56]

That Cave 17's Buddha shrine is not the *gandhakuṭī* in question, however, is suggested by this verse's stipulation that the *gandhakuṭī* is in another section to the West, as well as by the fact that earlier in this record, verse 24 mentions a separate caitya for the King of Sages excavated in the cave's recesses. A similar disjunctive pairing of *gandhakuṭī* and *tathāgatacaitya* is found in the MSV on several occasions. In one instance, the *gandhakuṭī* and Buddha's hair-and-nail stūpas are named as separate edifices that monks should repair when damaged;[57] in another, the text prescribes that if no other source of revenue is available with which to care for a sick monk, his nurse can sell a parasol, a pennant, flags, an ornament, or scented waters otherwise reserved for the saṅgha to cast upon the

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[55] For studies of the Buddha's chamber see John Strong. "Gandhakuṭī: The Perfumed Chamber of the Buddha," *History of Religions*. 16 (1977): 390-406, and Gregory Schopen. "The Buddha as an Owner of Property and Permanent Resident in Medieval Indian Monasteries," *Journal of Indian Philosophy*. 18 (1990): 181-217, esp. 193ff.

[56] *bhagavān āha: yadi trilayanaṃ kārayasi madhye gandhakuṭiḥ kārayitavyā dvayoḥ pārśvayoḥ dve layane; evaṃ triśāle nava layanāni; catuḥśāle madhye dvārakoṣṭhakābhimukhaṃ gandhakuṭiḥ; dvārakoṣṭhakapārśvayor dve layane* Gnoli. *Gilgit Manuscript of the Śayanāsanavastu*, 10-11.

[57] Dutt. *Gilgit Manuscripts*, vol. 3.2, 143.

tathāgatacaitya or the *gandhakuṭī*.[58] This latter passage suggests that although these two structures were physically distinct, they shared similar rituals. Cave 17's inscription also suggests that a *gandhakuṭī* and *munirājacaitya* were two distinct elements in its donor's plan. Yet, taking these to be the Cave 19 stūpa and the Cave 17 Buddha shrine respectively, we find that a certain ritual symmetry obtained between the two, for the same two images flank the entrance way to both excavations: on one side of the door is the bodhisattva Sumati[59] paying homage to Buddha Dīpaṅkara, on the other side, Rāhula, the Buddha's son, receiving his 'inheritance.' (The significance of these images will be discussed at length in the next chapter.)

That Cave 20 was also the production of Cave 17's donor is less secure. The argument most frequently articulated to support this position is based upon Bühler's reading of Cave 20's programmatic dedicatory inscription, wherein he suggests that "Upendra or Upendra [*gupta*]" was this cave's donor, and that his "father's name may have been Kṛi[*shṇa*] or Kṛi[*shṇadāsa*]."[60] The possible significance of these names vis-à-vis a relationship between this cave and Cave 17 is presented by Chandrashekhar Gupta as follows:

> The fragmentory [*sic*] inscription in Cave 20 is also written in box-headed characters identical to those of Caves 16 and 17. It mentions donation of this cave (*maṇḍapa*) by one Upendra(*gupta*) whose father and grandfather were named but got destroyed [*sic*]. An important clue is obtained by the presence of a letter *Kri* in 1.2 succeeding the word *pautrasya*. It makes clear that here the name of the father of Upendra was mentioned which is rightly reconstructed as Krishna or Krishnadasa by Bühler. Now we know one Krishnadasa from inscription [*sic*] in Cave 17 whose son got caused number [*sic*] of *vihāras* and *chaityas*. So there remains no doubt that the

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[58] *yat tathāgatacaitye vā gandhakuṭyāṃ va chattraṃ vā dhvajaṃ vā patākā vā ābharaṇakaṃ va saṃghena pānīyaṃ pātavyam iti | upasthāyikena vikrīya* Dutt. *Gilgit Manuscripts*, vol. 3.2, 125.

[59] This is the name given the bodhisattva of the "Dīpaṅkara jātaka" within the *Divyāvadāna*. In the Pāli *Nidānakathā*, he is called Sumedha; in the *Mahāvastu*, Megha.

[60] James Burgess. *Report on the Buddhist Cave Temples and their Inscriptions.* (Varanasi: Bharatiya Publishing House, 1975): 132.

> name of the feudatory chief who got excavated [*sic*] Caves 17 to 20 was Upendragupta as there is sufficient space after his name in 1.3 of the second inscription and one Upendragupta is also present in the geneology [*sic*] of the first inscription.[61]

There are quite a number of places in Gupta's argument at which the absolute certainty of his claim that "Upendragupta" patronized Caves 17-20 can be rendered not so very absolute. In light of Gupta's analysis, one wants to know what to do with the °*trasya* in line 5, which could be the remnant of *putrasya*, and the genitive singular °*sya* seemingly found in lines 6, 7, and 8, all of which must be shown to be epithets of the so-named Upendragupta of line 3, for otherwise they could quite possibly be the names of other members of the genealogy. More troublesome for Gupta's interpretation of the inscription, however, is that he begins his analysis by appeal to paleographic similarities between the Cave 17 and Cave 20 inscriptions. However, the *kṛ* of Cave 17's Kṛṣṇadāsa (Fig. 49) looks nothing like the so-called *kṛ* of the Cave 20 record (Fig. 48).[62] Instead, the medial vowel read by Gupta as °*ṛ*° at Cave 20, looks either like a sub-joined °*y*° (Fig. 50) or a sub-joined °*ṣ*° (Fig. 51). Indeed, this Cave 20 *akṣara*, if read *kṛ*, would be morphologically unique at Ajaṇṭā.[63] Thus, treating Cave 20's inscription in isolation as an

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[61] Gupta. "Authorship of Ajanta Caves 17 to 20," 102-3.

[62] These figures, like those discussed in appendix B, were created using a flatbed scanner etc. However, because the estampage found in Burgess's *Report* has served as the basis for all analyses of this inscription, I reproduce that facsimile even though it is "worked up:" a process that makes the individual letters more distinct at the price of introducing bias into all subsequent use of the estampage. Moreover, because I use Burgess' "worked up" estampage for the Cave 20 record, I have used his estampage of the Cave 17 inscription for parity.

[63] Again, allow me to clear up a possible point of confusion. One may wonder about the basis upon which this *akṣara* was originally read as *kṛ*. The answer is that *kṛ* with a right-facing hook is found in India's North at least as early as the Allahabad pillar inscription of Samudragupta (mid-4th century). However, the thesis presented by Gupta, and the point to which I am responding in the body of my essay, is that the Cave 17 and Cave 20 inscriptions have a paleographical kinship. A northern-style, right-hooked *kṛ* is found neither in the Cave 17 inscription, nor anywhere else at Ajaṇṭā, a southern site paleographically speaking. Surely, a scribe from India's North could have been responsible for the Cave 20 inscription (to make this case, one is required to explain why that scribe would have used a southern-style *ma* alongside the northern *kṛ*). However, this latter proposition would not in anyway bolster the argument that Caves 17 and 20 had a shared source of patronage.

integral donative record, one cannot be certain that Upendra, let alone Upendragupta, was the name of the *maṇḍapa's* donor; nor does it seem possible that someone whose name begins *Kṛ°* was the immediate ancestor of the donor. As these two points are ambiguous in the Cave 20 inscription, it is unsound to map the chronology and patronage of Cave 17 onto Cave 20 based upon epigraphic evidence.

Whereas the epigraphic evidence does not support this equation, Cave 20's donor does begin his dedication with his genealogy, a device not often found outside of royal inscriptions. Beyond the epigraph, Spink holds that the same donor was responsible for Caves 17 and 20 because Cave 20 possesses decorative motifs that he ties only to the period between 469 and 471 C.E., when all the donors but those of Caves 1, 17, 19, and 20 left off work. Although I problematized Spink's absolute chronology and narrative history above, I have found little to fault in his relative chronology. Accordingly, although the Cave 20 inscription does not establish an identity between its donor and that of Cave 17, we can at least posit the two had a close relationship based upon motival evidence. Reasoning thus, we might place Cave 20's donor within a royal milieu.

Cave 26's donor, Buddhabhadra is the only programmatic monk. Yet he too is deeply involved in court culture: Buddhabhadra is himself from a noble family (No. 93, verse 16); he affirms a friendship with a minister of the Aśmakan king that has persisted over the course of many lives (verse 9); that minister being deceased, Buddhabhadra flatters his son, also in the king's employ (verse 12); and Buddhabhadra dedicates the cave itself to that minister's memory along with the memory of his own parents (verse 13).

Finally there is the question of Cave 4's donor. Does he fit in this royal group? Cave 4's inscription identifies its donor, named Māthura, with two epithets that may suggest an answer. These two epithets call Māthura a "*vihārasvāmin*" and identify him as a member of the "*kārvvaṭeya sagotra*." Unfortunately, the former title has received a variety of

interpretations and the latter has no clear meaning. *Vihārasvāmin* may be translated literally as owner or master of a monastery. In addition to *vihārasvāmin*,[64] contemporary inscriptions also know of an *anekavihārasvāmin*, the owner/master of many vihāras,[65] and one *vihārasvāminī*, a female vihāra owner.[66] Fleet opines that this is "a technical religious title of office;"[67] and he interprets the female *vihārasvāminī* as designating the wife of a *vihārasvāmin*. Fleet's view of this as an institutional title is seconded by Gokhale, as is Fleet's understanding of the female title as designating a wife. Gokhale corrects Fleet's ignorance of Buddhist practice, however: no evidence exists that Buddhist monks took wives. In turn, Gokhale suggests *vihārasvāmin* be understood neither in line with the term's denotation, nor as an ecclesiastical office, but rather as a governmental position. Accordingly, a *vihārasvāmin* would be an officer responsible for the maintenance of a monastery or monasteries. In defense of this theory, Gokhale cites the Aśokan office of the *dharmamahāmātra* and the Gupta post of the *vinayasthitisthāpaka*, officers specifically charged with Buddhist affairs. "His general duties could have been the building, endowment and upkeep of the monasteries that enjoyed royal grants. In some cases he could have been wealthy himself, favorably disposed to Buddhism in his personal faith, considering it an act of merit to build or endow a monastery at his own expense."[68]

Gokhale's observations, if applied to Cave 4's Māthura, would clearly place him with Ajaṇṭā's other known donors as a participant in royal culture. However, a somewhat

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[64] John Faithfull Fleet. *Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings and Their Successors*. Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, volume 3. (Varanasi, Indological Book House, 1970): 279.

[65] Georg Bühler. "The New Inscription of Toramana Shaha," *Epigraphia Indica*. 1 (1892): 240.

[66] Fleet. *Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings,* 263.

[67] Fleet. *Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings,* 279, n. 5.

[68] Balkrishna Govind Gokhale. "Buddhism in the Gupta Age." In *Essays on Gupta Culture*. Ed. by Bardwell L. Smith. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983): 144.

more contemporary and less speculative explanation for the term may be gleaned from I-Tsing, who writes that the term *vihārasvāmin* was used to designate a vihāra's founder: "the founder of the establishment was, in fact, honored as the master of the temple, Ssu-chu. In Sanskrit he was know as Pi-ho-luo-sha-mi, Vihārasvāmin."[69]

Unfortunately, contemporary Sanskrit literature provides little assistance. The only use of this term I have found in the MSV comes at the end of a tale about a brāhmaṇa who pays reverence to the Buddha, takes refuge, and is blessed by his field giving forth barley of gold. Amazed at this miracle, the brāhmaṇa runs to the king and declares "a grand monastery should be erected by your superintendent,"[70] a request the king eventually allows. Immediately following this tale in the text is one involving 500 farmers who see Śākyamuni Buddha, become monks and attain arhatship. The Buddha's disciples are amazed by these 500 farmer/monks and ask the Buddha what in their past lives resulted in this chain of events. Buddha then tells a tale of five hundred farmers who became monks at the time of Kāśyapa Buddha, but were slackards spending their days eating the alms provided by the faithful. At the end of the story, Buddha claims the five hundred farmers were those five hundred monks from Kāśyapa's day, and that the *vihārasvāmin* of the story is now this householder. Unfortunately, this story as told in the *Divyāvadāna* and MSV has no prior mention of a *"vihārasvāmin*" or a "householder." It would seem from context and the general logic of Buddhist narratives that in a fuller version of this tale the "householder" may have been the brāhmaṇa with the golden barley; this brāhmaṇa's support for a grand monastery for Śākyamuni then being explained by his status as a

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[69] I-Tsing. *Chinese Monks in India: Biography of Eminent Monks who Went to the Western World in Search of the Law During the Great T'ang Dyasty*. Trans. by Latika Lahiri. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986): 54.

[70] *deva mayā yavāḥ prakīrṇās te sauvarṇāḥ saṃvṛttāḥ | tatrādhiṣṭhāyikena prasādaḥ kriyatām iti* | Dutt. *Gilgit Manuscripts,* vol. 3.1, 70; Edward Byles Cowell and R. A. Neil (eds). *The Divyāvadāna*. (Delhi: Indological Book House, 1987): 462.

vihārasvāmin at the time of Kāśyapa Buddha. In short, the MSV adds little to our understanding of the term.

The *Abhisamācārikā* though not overly explicit on this matter, seems to have understood *vihārasvāmin* as a term used exclusively for lay Buddhists. In the course of a set of rules concerning appropriate forms of address between monks and between monks and their kin it is said that, "it is not fitting for a monk [who] wants to speak to a female *upāsaka, dānapati,* or a *vihārasvāminī* [to use terms] such as mom, dear-heart, or lady."[71] Interestingly, in the subsequent discussion, prescribing monastic address to lay male kin, the appropriate terms of address are *upāsaka* and *dānapati,* but *vihārasvāmin* is not mentioned.

The most extensive study of this term is found in an article by Sylvain Lévi and Edouard Chavannes, which discusses the transformation whereby nominally lay ownership of monasteries was replaced by monastic control, as witnessed in the fact that the monk in charge of dwellings came to be called *vihārasvāmin*. Within the time frame surveyed by Lévi and Chavannes, this substitution of ecclesiastic control for lay ownership was by no means complete: Māthura is doubtless a lay figure. Lévi and Chavannes's study provides little foundation for Gokhale's supposition of a *vihārasvāmin* having a governmental role. Yet, the literature they survey suggests that a *vihārasvāmin*, even if lay, would have had some sort of hand in running the monastery itself. Glossing *vihārasvāmin*, the *Fan fan yu,* a sixth century (?) Chinese glossary of Sanskrit terms, observes that "according to grammarians: If one conforms oneself directly to the sounds of the foreign lands, it would be necessary to say *mo-mo-to-ko-mi-t'o-t'o. Mo-mo-ti,* in translation, is 'the director of the temple;' *ko-mi-t'o-t'o*, in translation, is 'governor.' Thus this means the governing director of

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[71] *eṣo bhkṣuḥ upāsakāṃ vā dānapatīnāṃ vā vihārasvāminīṃ vā śabdāyituṃkāmi bhavati nāpi kṣamati ambeti vā atteti vā bhadde[ti vā] | atha khalu upāsakaketti vā dānapati tti vā vihārasvāmini tti vā śabbdāyitavyaṃ* | B. Jinanda (ed). *Abhisamācārikā (Bhikṣuprakīrṇaka).* (Patna: Kashi Prasad Jayaswal Research Institute, 1969): 127-8.

the temple."[72]

Turning to Māthura's identification of himself as of the *Kārvvaṭeya sagotra*, we have even less to go on than before. Sircar was unable to make much sense of this word, averring "the Kārvaṭiyā *gotra* is not known from ancient Indian literature."[73] Hints for what *kārvvaṭeya* may signify, however, come from Buddhist Sanskrit literature and the Ajaṇṭā caves themselves. According to Edgerton, the word *kārvaṭika*, found in the *Divyāvadāna* and MSV, may be translated as "chief of a village."[74] Edgerton further suggests that the village of which a *kārvaṭika* is the chief may be located in the mountains:[75] *kārvaṭika* is a derivative of *karvaṭaka,* a term the *Mahāvyutpatti* (#9356) translates into Tibetan as *ri 'or wa*, which S. C. Das translates as denoting "people living in the neighborhood of mountains and forests."[76] Sircar's epigraphic glossary translates *karvaṭaka* as "market town."[77] Monier-Williams records that Sanskrit lexicographies record *karvaṭaka* signifies a mountain slope, but that it is also used in the sense of a village, a market-town, or the capital of a district comprised of many villages;[78] the associated *kāvaṭa* and *kāvaṭika* being defined in lexicographies as districts of 100 and 200 villages respectively.[79] What this all means for the study of Ajaṇṭā is that Cave 4's donor possibly belonged to a family that governed a village or a large number of such villages; these villages may have been in the

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[72] Lévi and Chavannes. "Quelques Titres Enigmatiques," 202.

[73] Dinesh Chandra Sircar. "Inscription in Cave IV at Ajaṇṭā," *Epigraphia Indica*. 33 (1959-60): 260.

[74] Franklin Edgerton. *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar and Dictionary*. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1985): 179b.

[75] Edgerton. *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar and Dictionary,* 171a.

[76] Sarat Chandra Das. *A Tibetan-English Dictionary*. (New Delhi: Gaurav Publishing House, 1985): 1177a.

[77] Dinesh Chandra Sircar. *Indian Epigraphical Glossary*. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1966): 150.

[78] Monier Monier-Williams. *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988): 259c.

[79] Monier-Williams. *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 280a.

mountains or forest. Indeed, Cave 4's size and (had it been completed) opulence suggest that Māthura was a man with considerable wealth at his disposal, perhaps more than the taxes from a single village would provide. It is also interesting to note that the designation of *kārvvaṭeya* as a *sagotra*, if interpreted thus, gives evidence for the local economy's movement towards a feudal pattern, since this indicates that governorships were here not merely a matter of royal appointment but were being treated as a *jāti* within the 'caste' hierarchy.

Turning from social information we possess about these programmatic donors based upon their inscriptions to the religious, we again find a remarkable coherence. Ajaṇṭā's programmatic donors appear to have been overwhelmingly associated with beliefs and practices that are typically categorized as "Mahāyāna." This is a tentative claim, made as part of a synopsis. I will explore the question of Ajaṇṭā's *yānic* associations in greater depth within the chapter on Dharma. Here, I wish simply to enumerate the evidence that leads me towards this observation. Cave 4's Māthura dedicates the merit of his donation using the formula: "Whatever merit there is in it, may that serve [his] mother, father, and paternal grandmother -- to whom belongs the principle share --, as well as all sentient beings' attainment of unexcelled knowledge." According to Schopen's study of Buddhist epigraphs this dedication found in Cave 4 is a variant of a formula that is "virtually the exclusive property of the Mahāyāna."[80] Although the Cave 20 inscription is so fragmentary, it too seems to use a variant on this same formula, as does verse 15 of the Cave 26 inscription. As I have noted above Cave 26's Buddhabhadra is the only monk among the programmatic donors, and thus holds greater value as an epitome for normative Buddhism at Ajaṇṭā. Accordingly, it is particularly significant that Buddhabhadra characterizes himself in verse 7 as one of a number of "bodhisattvas," who put their "power and affluence" to

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[80] Gregory Schopen. "Mahāyāna in Indian Inscriptions," *Indo-Iranian Journal.* 21 (1979): 12.

work by patronizing the excavation of cave temples. The equation between the bodhisattva path and the Mahāyāna is found throughout Mahāyānist literature, and has been with us in the West almost as long as Buddhism. Since I will discuss this in greater length below, I restrict myself here to a single example. Paul Williams summarizes this line of thinking his recent textbook on the Mahāyāna: "this, if anything, characterizes the Mahāyāna. . . . To set the path of the Bodhisattva as the ultimate aspiration for all seems to be a uniquely Mahāyāna conception."[81] In light of this equation, Cave 17's donor's description of his activity as being "for the perfection of [his] vow [to become] a Buddha (*munīndra*)" would place him directly within the Mahāyānist fold. Similarly in verse 18, he speaks of a teaching he held dear named "The Perfect Equality of Affect Towards the Wise Man and the Criminal." Although this particular practice is not known from other sources, its title suggests a kinship with a set of practices described in the eighth chapter of Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, whereby a bodhisattva strives to identify himself with others, and to substitute himself for others; these practices described by Śāntideva have retained such importance that they number among the first contemporary Tibetan teachers impart to their Western students. One final example from Cave 17's inscription is found in verse 20, where this vihāra's donor is said to be "constantly amassing the accumulations" of knowledge and merit. These 'accumulations' (*saṃbhāra*) were very important within Nāgārjuna's presentation of Mahāyāna doctrine. In the *Ratnāvalī,* a text written for a 'popular,' even royal, audience, Nāgārjuna claims that the accumulations of wisdom and knowledge are the causes of Buddhahood,[82] and are taught exclusively within the

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[81] Paul Williams. *Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations.* (New York: Routledge, 1989): 25.

[82] *Ratnāvalī* 3.11: *de lta bas na tshogs 'di gñis | sangs rgyas ñid ni thob pa'i rgyu |* Michael Hahn (ed). *Nāgārjuna's Ratnāvalī.* (Bonn: Indica et Tibetica Verlag, 1982): 74.

Mahāyāna.[83]

Cave 16 is the only programmatic donation for which we have epigraphic evidence that does not give any indication its benefactor was influenced by ostensibly Mahāyānist doctrines. In point of fact, Varāhadeva's verses are more or less devoid of doctrinal content that could be meaningfully associated with either *yāna*. The only verse that could suggest a *yānic* affiliation for Varāhadeva is the final one, a dedication that wills that "the entire world enter that peaceful and noble state free from sorrow and disease, [attained] by destroying the many faults." Varāhadeva's description of the ultimate goal as a place that is *śānta* (peaceful), *aśoka* (free from sorrow), and *nirjvara* (free of disease) echoes the conception of nirvāṇa presented in the *Lotus Sūtra's* seventh chapter, where nirvāṇa is described as being like a city the Buddha magically conjures in order to afford his disciples a place to rest enroute to the greater goal of Buddhahood. But, whereas the *Lotus* declares the City of Nirvāṇa to be a mere expedient, Varāhadeva presents this as the highest goal. The *Lotus Sūtra's* doctrine comes far closer to the view of nirvāṇa presented in verse 2 of Buddhabhadra's inscription -- "[the Buddha] has departed for the City of Tranquility, which is blissful [and] free of fear, [but] without any fixed location -- than suggested by Varāhadeva's text. In the same vein, Varāhadeva's phrase *vyastadoṣaprahāṇa* (destroying the many faults) echoes a common cliché used throughout Buddhist literature to describe the attainment of Hīnayānist arhatship, *sarvakleśaprahāṇa* (the destroying of all afflictions).

Far more interesting information for our recovery of Indian Buddhism will be found in this inscription's verse 30, where Varāhadeva refers to himself by the title "*śāstā*," i.e., teacher or ruler, and claims to be "celebrated as a *Sugata*." It is remarkable to find these two epithets in this context. Throughout Buddhist literature both are commonly used

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[83] *Ratnāvalī* 4.67: *bodhisattvasya saṃbhāro mahāyāne tathāgataiḥ | nirdiṣṭaḥ* Hahn. *Nāgārjuna's Ratnāvalī,* 118.

to refer to the Buddha himself. Granted, these epithets are not exclusively technical terms referring to the Buddha. In fact, they may well have been used colloquially for someone in Varāhadeva's position -- *śāstā* can simply designate a "ruler;" a *sugata* can be somebody who has done well for himself, and is used at least once in the MSV to designate someone destined for a heavenly rebirth.[84] Nevertheless, it is difficult to imagine that these terms' strong associations with the Buddha were unknown to this verse's author or were unintended. The significance of Buddha as ruler, and Varāhadeva as ruler as Buddha, will be explored in greater depth in the subsequent chapter on Buddha.

Identifying Ajaṇṭā's Intrusive Donors: On Collective Patronage

By way of introduction to Ajaṇṭā's intrusive donors let us recall why they are deemed "intrusive." According to Spink's chronology, Ajaṇṭā's nineteen year history saw two periods of excavation and decoration, each of which concluded with a phase of rushed programmatic work and then a cessation of work. These two broad periods differ significantly, however, in that one more sub-phase is associated with the second, an "intrusive phase" between the rush to completion and Ajaṇṭā's final abandonment. Spink ties every image, every inscription, every donation that cannot be associated with a cohesively planned, well-ordered pattern of excavation and decoration to this intrusive phase. This view of patronage at the site only makes sense, however, in light of a vision that sees Ajaṇṭā's programmatic patrons as having an exclusivist membership and as having a high degree of control over their caves. The august individuals familiar to us from Caves 4, 16, 17, and 26's donative inscriptions fulfill Spink's exclusivity requirement. As for bureaucratic control over the site, I treated this matter above through the example of Cave 17's Wheel of Existence. Supplementing that discussion, however, we find that Spink takes

[84] Gnoli. *Gilgit Manuscript of the Śayanāsanavastu,* 38.

the apparent cessation of all activity at Ajaṇṭā between the two periods of programmatic work as proof positive for a strong distinction between programmatic and intrusive phases. Spink calls this intermediate period of no activity a "Hiatus," during which "not a single image of any type whatsoever was added to any of the caves at the site."[85] Spink interprets the lack of all patronage during the Hiatus to "not so much suggest the site's abandonment during this period" as "its continued occupation and preservation of the insistent exclusiveness that had characterized the site's patronage from the start."[86] Accordingly, the lack of all work at Ajaṇṭā during the Hiatus proves to Spink that programmatic patterns of decoration and central control over the site were inextricably linked. For "had controls relaxed during the Hiatus, we would surely find intrusive images interrupting the programmed work done after 475; but we do not. Indeed, all obvious intrusions at the site 'fit' into a much later period (479-80)."[87]

The importance of Spink's dichotomy between programmatic and intrusive phases lies in its ability to segregate the strata of donative activities, synchronically across the entire site and diachronically within a single cave. Lacking this periodization, we would possess only a murky vision of the patterns of patronage at Ajaṇṭā. Nevertheless, even if one does not question Spink's relative chronology or characterizations of motival development, one problem can be found with Spink's presentation of patronage at Ajaṇṭā. Earlier in this chapter I claimed that Spink presupposes a certain general homogeneity at the site vis-à-vis programmes of excavation and decoration. Here, too, we find that he presupposes a single canon for patronage; namely, that every cave at Ajaṇṭā was the donation of a single wealthy and powerful man or woman who bought himself or herself a

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[85] Spink. "Archaeology of Ajaṇṭā," 81.

[86] Spink. "Archaeology of Ajaṇṭā," 81.

[87] Spink. "Archaeology of Ajaṇṭā," 94, n. 24.

place among the "consortium of the emperor's richest and most powerful courtiers"[88] that patronized and controlled the site. Above, I questioned -- though did not dispute -- the assumption of homogeneity in decorative schemes; and I referred to the breadth of Buddhist institutions, some of which have restrictions against figural representations of the sort found in the major painted caves. By comparing Ajaṇṭā with Bāgh, I suggested that some caves may be painted differently than Cave 1, 2, 16, 17, or even not painted at all, not as a result of the site's troubled history, but because alternative vinaya regulations or aesthetic sensibilities guided their programmes. Similarly, now, we might inquire whether other alternate paradigms for patronage were available to Ajaṇṭā's donors, and whether the caves other than 4, 16, 17, 20, and 26 may have been created by patrons who understood their undertaking accordingly. We may wonder whether these other patronage paradigms would have yielded as coherent a programme as that found in, e.g., Caves 16 and 17. And we may ask whether many caves have no programmatic dedicatory inscription naming a single donor because the patronage responsible for them would not have required such an inscription.

Turning to an earlier period in the history of Buddhist patronage, one finds a very different conception indeed. Inscriptions found in Ajaṇṭā's Caves 10 and 12 from the first phase of activity, suggest these excavations were collective group efforts, not the exclusive property or dedication of an individual donor. Thus Vāsiṣṭhīputra Kaṭahādi, possibly a member of the royal Śātavāhana family, dedicated Cave 10's façade (app. A, No. 40); one Dhamadeva dedicated this same cave's *prāsādas* (app. A, No. 41);[89] and Kanhaka of Bāhaḍa was responsible for a wall (app. A, No. 42). Similarly, although the single inscription from Cave 12 is problematic, it seems to suggest that the merchant

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[88] Spink. "Archaeology of Ajaṇṭā," 69.

[89] See my discussion of this inscription in the appendix for the different meanings of *prasāda.*

Ghanāmadaḍa dedicated the cell beside which this inscription is located, and not the entire vihāra.

These examples from Ajaṇṭā's first stage fit into a broader pattern of collective patronage characteristic of the first centuries B.C.E. and C.E. As Romila Thapar puts it: "Examples of [community patronage] become evident during the period from the second century BC to the fourth AD in the patronage extended to the building of *stūpas* such as those at Sanchi, Bharhut, and Amaravati and the rock cut caves of the Western Deccan, all of which had at source donations of the Buddhist *saṅgha*. The donations came substantially from artisans, guilds of craftsmen, traders, monks and nuns, small scale landowners and to a lesser extent from royalty and families in high and administrative political office."[90] On the same theme, Vidya Dehejia observes that "collective patronage was a pan-Indian phenomenon during this early period. . . . Stable political conditions apparently led to considerable economic prosperity, and surplus money seems to have accumulated in the hands of a wide section of the community."[91]

Conversely, in this earlier period, royal non-collective patronage of Western Indian Buddhism is "in evidence only at one site, Nasik, and there too in just two caves."[92] This, by contrast with the fifth century and after, when the patrons of religious temples and arts like Ajaṇṭā "were great monarchs . . . who constructed entire monumental structures to collect both fame and religious merit for themselves."[93] Thapar similarly notes the relative paucity of royal patronage in the earlier period and the predominantly royal nature of

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[90] Romila Thapar. "Patronage and Community." In *The Powers of Art: Patronage in Indian Culture*. Ed. by Barbara Stoler Miller. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992): 22.

[91] Vidya Dehejia. "The Collective and Popular Basis of Early Buddhist Patronage: Sacred Monuments, 100 BC-AD 250." In *The Powers of Art: Patronage in Indian Culture*. Ed. by Barbara Stoler Miller. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992): 44.

[92] Dehejia. "Collective and Popular," 39.

[93] Dehejia. "Collective and Popular," 35.

patronage in the Gupta era and after.[94]

Is it possible that a pattern of collective donations did continue into the latter half of the fifth century? From the "Hindu" side there is at least one well known instance of patronage in this period involving a donation by a corporate body of non-royal devotees. I am referring here the building and reconstruction of a temple to the sun god Sūrya by a guild of Silk-Weavers in the city of Mandasor.[95]

Evidence for cooperative, if not collective, donation of monasteries at Ajaṇṭā during its Vākāṭaka phase, can be found through an analysis of plastering in the shrines of Caves Upper 6, 7, and 26. That is, in these three caves a single application of plaster was spread over a set of sculptures that included programmatic and intrusive images both. The details regarding the positioning, composition, and contents of these images all have bearing upon how one determines which are programmatic and which intrusive. However, I will leave aside that laborious excess of information, and instead cite Spink's general observations on the plastering of Caves Upper 6 and 7: "It is interesting to note that the very same mix of fine gray white-seeded plaster, applied without a break and then painted covers both the huge Buddhas [(which are programmatic donations]) and the little intrusions in the shrine antechamber; indeed, it continues over the shrine doorway and its still-rough margins, and appears to be identical in type and application with that covering the main Buddha image. Thus, just as in Cave 7, it appears that although the original patron was drastically affected by Hariṣeṇa's death, and had to somewhat reduce his ongoing carving program in both the shrine and shrine antechamber, he did not feel as compelled as most of his peers to get his Buddha image completed and dedicated in 478, which he surely could have done . . . Just like his counterpart in the adjacent Cave 7, the

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[94] Thapar. "Patronage and Community," 30.

[95] A. L. Basham "The Mandasor Inscription of the Silk-Weavers." In *Essays on Gupta Culture*. Ed. by Bardwell L. Smith. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983): 93-105.

patron of Cave Upper 6, having waited until the eager new 'intruders' had filled all of the available spaces in his shrine antechamber, saw to the more or less proper completion of the whole grouping."[96]

In Cave 26 too there is at least one instance in which programmatic plaster clearly covers intrusive images: on the wall of the left aisle, in conjunction with Ajaṇṭā's renowned carving of the scene of Buddha's Mahāparinirvāṇa. There are a vast number of Buddha images lining the aisle walls of Cave 26, but Spink identifies this panel of the Dying Buddha as one of only a small number attributable to Buddhabhadra's own design; the remainder, sculpted helter-skelter, are designated 'intrusions.' Significantly, in Spink's telling, Cave 26's Dying Buddha was not yet finished before the intrusive phase began. He writes, "Even while it was being painted, time ran out; a few sanguine sketches on the white plaster show precisely when -- in 478 -- the decisive moment came."[97] As in Caves Upper 6 and 7, prior to the coming of that end, intrusions were already added to this cave. This can be determined by the fact that the same white plaster Spink deems to be programmatic was also slathered over several haphazardly placed 'intrusive' panels to the right of the Mahāparinirvāṇa scene. In fact, one of these intrusions plastered by Buddhabhadra was carved directly into the Dying Buddha scene itself, into the leaves of the right Sala tree near the Buddha's feet (Fig. 52).

This example from Cave 26 is particularly telling, because we know the identity of it programmatic donor, and know that he claims responsibility for the entire cave. Accordingly, we must presume that Buddhabhadra sanctioned the carving of at least these few intrusive images, including the one that mars his own composition. One explanation for Buddhabhadra's rationale might be found in the final verse of Cave 17's dedicatory

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[96] Spink. "A Scholar's Guide"

[97] Spink. "A Scholar's Guide"

inscription, where this royal donor hopes that his vihāra will "help good people to produce merit as long as the sun dispels darkness by its rays." Perhaps the donors of Caves Upper 6, 7, and 26 were attempting to realize a similar aim, by allowing good people to make merit through the creation of Buddha-images within their caves.

These are tentative and preliminary observations from which I have excluded a wealth of details. Beyond a more in-depth examination of these examples, additional evidence for alternate patterns of patronage can be found in Caves 9, 10, 23 as well as through further exploration of Cave 26, and comparative evidence from Taxila and Nāgārjunakoṇḍa. Suffice it to say, a study of Ajaṇṭā's programmatic inscriptions shows a pattern of patronage wherein single, male, wealthy donors, each possessed of a singular vision of his cave's architectural, decorative, and iconographic programmes, controlled that cave until he was forced to relinquish it due to historical circumstance. Nevertheless, it may be possible that, for some donors, those programmes included a provision for "intrusive" images to be added on an occasional basis to the cave, producing merit for the image's donor as well as for the particular Vākāṭaka luminary who helped that good person to produce merit.

Intrusive Patrons

So far I have identified Ajaṇṭā's donors and discussed patterns of patronage based upon the information contained in the programmatic donative inscriptions. As noted in the previous chapter concerning textual sources for the study of Ajaṇṭā, the inclusion of a written dedication with a donation seems to have been an optional practice. Leaving aside whole caves, the intrusive icons lacking an identification of their donors far outnumber those for which the donor is identified. Accordingly, one should be clear that whereas these dedicatory inscriptions provide the best documentary evidence for identifying and

understanding Ajaṇṭā's saṅgha, it does not exhaust the subject.

The epigraphs and images associated with Ajaṇṭā's intrusive patrons provide us with little indication of the people behind the works. As I noted in the previous chapter, these inscriptions are typically highly formulaic. The only indexical information they provide about a donor is usually the individual's name and whether he (or, in only one instance, she) is a lay or monastic Buddhist. Based upon this information, as one can see from Fig. 53, donors in the intrusive phase were far more often monks than members of the laity. And, accordingly, one finds monastic epithets like *bhikṣu* (monk), *bhadanta* (reverend), and *ācārya* (teacher) far more often than *upāsaka* (lay devotee).

If one will recall from the previous chapter, in Rappaport's analysis, liturgies -- and the liturgical use of donative inscriptions -- provides canonical information, in addition to the indexical. This canonical information is encoded in the invariant aspects of the liturgy/inscription, and tells us about the tenets a patron accepted. Within Ajaṇṭā's intrusive inscriptions, canonical information is found principally in two places. First there is a patron's use or non-use of a formula for dedicating merit, and the particular wording this formula takes. A second canonical element is the donors' use of the epithet Ś*ākya* to prefix to the traditional lay and monastic identifications, *upāsaka* and *bhikṣu*. I include this as a canonical element, because it provides qualitative information, telling us what kind of *upāsaka* or *bhikṣu* such and such a donor was.

In fact, putting aside donations of indeterminate origin, a full 80 percent of Ajaṇṭā's monastic donors use a single epithet before their names: Ś*ākyabhikṣu*; of the lay donors, a little less than half use the parallel title: Ś*ākya-upāsaka*. Although until this point I have referred to Ajaṇṭā's saṅgha as associated with the Mūlasarvāstivāda *nikāya*, in view of these inscription, it might be more meaningful to speak of it as the Ś*ākya-saṅgha*, comprised of Buddhists who identified themselves with Ś*ākya*. Unfortunately,

Ś*ākyabhikṣu* and Ś*ākya-upāsaka* have no immediate institutional or ideological significance. The title Ś*ākyabhikṣu*, whether it is an honorific or an institutional designation, is extremely rare in Indian Buddhist literary sources. Nevertheless, nearly 4 out of 5 of the dedications dated to Ajaṇṭā's intrusive period employ this term. To understand the portion of Ajaṇṭā's saṅgha responsible for these intrusive inscriptions and donations, we need to ascertain who Ajaṇṭā's Ś*ākyabhikṣus* and Ś*ākya-upāsakas* were. Why did so many of Ajaṇṭā's Buddhists adopt these epithets? What was their place within the greater Buddhist community?

Allow me to foreshorten this discussion of Ajaṇṭā's intrusive patrons, and leave these matters dangling past the end of the present chapter. These questions, the final from a chapter that has asked many and answered few, provide a bridge to the next chapter, wherein I introduce the Dharma of Ajaṇṭā's community.

CHAPTER IV

DHARMA: THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF BUDDHISM AT AJAṆṬĀ

Early in this century Magdalene and Wilhelm Geiger drew up a concordance of all the uses of "Dharma" within the Pāli canon. They listed four principal and sixteen secondary meanings for *Dharma*, which they called the most polyvalent and central of Buddhist terms.[1] Although the Geigers' project was quickly criticized by Th. Stcherbatsky, who felt it substituted philological comprehensiveness for analysis,[2] Stcherbatsky's agreement with their assessment of Dharma's import is witnessed in the title of his own book on the meaning of "Dharma," *The Central Conception of Buddhism.* Stcherbatsky's methodological criticisms notwithstanding, lexicographical listings parallel to that of the Geigers are found within the Buddhist tradition itself. For instance, Vasubandhu's *Vyākhyāyukti* lists ten meanings for the word Dharma: "1) an element of existence (in general), 2) the Path, 3) Nirvāṇa, 4) a non-sensuous element, 5) virtue, 6) life, 7) the Doctrine, 8) (the quality of) constant becoming, 9) religious vow, and 10) worldly law."[3] And just as the Geigers had a redactor for their work in Stcherbatsky -- who proposed that out of the many meanings they listed, Dharma's significance as the keystone of Buddhist

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[1] Magdalene Geiger and Wilhelm Geiger. *Pāli Dhamma, vornehmlich in der kanonische Literatur.* Abhandlungen der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften philosophisch-philologische und historische Klasse XXXI, Band 1. (Munich: Verlag der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1920): 1.

[2] Th. Stcherbatsky. *The Central Conception of Buddhism and the Meaning of the Word "Dharma."* (Delhi: Indological Book House, 1970): 1.

[3] Bu ston. *The Jewelry of Scripture by Bu ston.* Trans. by E. E. Obermiller. (Delhi: Sri Satguru, 1987): 18.

philosophy was the most salient -- so the fourteenth century Tibetan Bu-ston redacts Vasubandhu's list, proposing that "Dharma" in the sense of "doctrine" is the most salient meaning when it comes to reconstructing Indian Buddhist history. Bu-ston further analyzes this term's significance, claiming "it is necessary to distinguish, -- the Doctrine as the practice, and the Doctrine as the theory, the word of Scripture."[4] The theory and practice of Buddhism at Ajaṇṭā, such will be the general subject matter of the present chapter.

The potential myriad of beliefs members of Ajaṇṭā's community could have held and practices they could have performed requires that I limit this over-broad subject matter. To do so, I will turn to a matter that has puzzled me since the time I first began working on the Ajaṇṭā caves. That is to say, attempting to relate evidence at the site to Buddhism's native categories, I was struck first by my expectation that Ajaṇṭā belonged exclusively to one of the two *yānas*, and second by my inability to establish which *yāna* it was.

In this dissertation's first chapter, I reviewed the prior scholarship on Ajaṇṭā, noting that the study of this site took a giant leap forward when James Fergusson's relative chronology of western Indian Buddhist cave sites based upon "critical surveys" and "careful comparisons" was set within a discursive context that took its descriptive categories from Buddhist literature. Thus Fergusson and Burgess' opus, *The Cave Temples of India*, periodizes the more than one thousand Buddhist caves scattered across Western India into two neat phases: the Hīnayāna, stretching from approximately the second century B.C.E. until the third C.E., and then the Mahāyāna, commencing in the fifth century at Ajaṇṭā. These scholars also present a clear morphological screen through which caves belonging to the two can be distinguished: Hīnayāna caves "are generally plain in style,

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[4] Bu ston. *The Jewelry of Scripture,* 21.

and are devoid of images of Buddha for worship,"[5] whereas those of the Mahāyāna have as their principle characteristic the "multiplications of images of Buddha."[6] Nor is this periodization based upon *yānic* associations a nineteenth century relic. It has continued in the major textbooks of Indian art history: Benjamin Rowland discusses Ajaṇṭa's Cave 19 as a "Mahāyāna Buddhist sanctuary;"[7] Susan Huntington typologizes Cave 17 as "a standard Mahāyāna *vihāra*."[8] That the history of western Indian cave excavations can be differentiated into two general periods based upon morphological variations stands beyond doubt. But how accurate was these scholars' use of institutional categories derived from Buddhist literature to qualify these intervals?

Indeed, this problem is not unique to the study of Buddhist cave sites. Introductory courses and textbooks have long adopted this pair of native Indian terms for their presentation of Buddhism. When students retain one fact about Indian Buddhism, it is probably this distinction. And even at more advanced stages of scholarship, Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna remain valued concepts, like elder children who keep the younger in line. Tracing the margins of difference between Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna has long been a popular concern in the study of Indian Buddhism. Typically the two are represented in stark opposition: the Hīnayāna champions the arhat-ideal, the Mahāyāna, the bodhisattva-ideal; the Hīnayāna is centered on the saṅgha, the Mahāyāna, on the Buddha; the Hīnayāna is rationalist in its metaphysics, the Mahāyāna, mystical; Hīnayāna is ethical, Mahāyāna devotional; the Hīnayāna has closed its canon, the Mahāyāna allows for

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[5] James Fergusson and James Burgess. *The Cave Temples of India.* (Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint, 1969): 170.

[6] Fergusson and Burgess. *Cave Temples of India*, 297.

[7] Benjamin Rowland. *The Art and Architecture of India: Buddhist, Hindu, Jain.* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1971): 130.

[8] Susan L. Huntington. *The Art of Ancient India: Buddhist, Hindu, Jain.* (New York: Weatherhill, 1985): 254.

continuing 'revelation.' These distinctions streamline Buddhism's complex history, emplotting the religion's development around a clearly articulated transition.

The implications of such simplification are at least twofold. First, exaggeration of the differences between Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna for the sake of easy comparison suggests a thoroughgoing divorce between them on every level, in terms of institution, doctrine, practice. Second, the sequential nature of teaching one *yāna* and then the other implies the Mahāyāna was a historical *fait accompli* that more or less superseded Hīnayāna in India. Nevertheless, simplification of material is a necessary evil in any discipline, not just Buddhist studies. And these remarkably clear characterizations of the Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna do not derive from modern scholars alone. The Mahāyāna's own rhetoric warrants such dualist constructions, fostering an expectation that historically the Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna *were* completely separate. One of the clearest statements thereof is found in Ārya Asaṅga's fourth century *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* (verse 1.10), a formative classic of Mahāyāna doctrine: "the Śrāvakayāna [i.e., Hīnayāna] and Mahāyāna are mutually opposed."[9] For Asaṅga this fundamental incommensurability is ideological and practical in nature: the two *yānas* diverge in their aspirations (*āśaya*), teachings (*upadeśa*), practices (*prayoga*), supports (*upastambha*),[10] and times (*kāla*).[11] This brief analysis ends with Asaṅga's assessment that "as a result of [the two *yānas*'] mutual opposition, the Hīnayāna is truly inferior; it is not capable of becoming the Mahāyāna."[12]

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[9] *viruddham eva cānyonyaṃ śrāvakayānaṃ mahāyānaṃ ca.* Asaṅga. *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra.* Ed. by Dwarika Das Shastri. (Varanasi: Bauddha Bharati, 1985): 4.

[10] According to Mahāyāna doctrine, spiritual transformation takes place over a more or less prolonged span, during which an adherent accumulates spiritual merit (*puṇya*) and develops spiritual insight (*jñāna*). These two are envisioned as "supports."

[11] See the previous note. Because the Mahāyāna purports to require more and greater "supports," the period of time necessary for the realization of its highest goal also surpasses that of the Śrāvakayāna.

[12] *tasmād anyonyavirodhād yad yānaṃ hīnaṃ hīnam eva tat | na tan mahāyānaṃ bhavitum arhati |* Asaṅga. *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra,* 4.

Asaṅga's polemic is seductive, suggesting that the distinction between Great and Little Vehicles is thoroughgoing, and thus that a comprehensive set of criteria can be formulated through which to distinguish them. Indeed, the indices of differentiation Asaṅga cites -- aspirations, teachings, etc. -- are precisely those that modern analyses of Buddhism use for reconstructing Buddhism's history along *yānic* lines. Nevertheless, although Mahāyāna polemic literature fosters the treatment of Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna as ideal types, the historian's task is "to complicate not to clarify," in J. Z. Smith's phrase.[13] So, how historically accurate are these characterizations? How useful is the Mahāyāna/Hīnayāna distinction for defining the Dharma of Ajaṇṭā's community?

Bu-ston claimed that Dharma understood as doctrine has a praxical component and a theoretical, the latter involving the careful study of Buddhism's sūtras and śāstras. Despite the more wide-ranging set of criteria Asaṅga presents for distinguishing the *yānas* vis-à-vis Dharma, Bu-ston's may be more useful. Bu-ston's presentation is seconded by I-Tsing, who observes quite matter-of-factly that in seventh century India "those who worship the Bodhisattvas and read the Mahāyāna Sūtras are called the Mahāyānists, while those who do not perform these are called the Hīnayānists."[14] These seem an ideal set of criteria for the archaeologist of Buddhism, allowing a strictly material, even digital, means for determining the presence or absence of the Mahāyāna at a particular site. Unfortunately, however, no specific sūtras, Mahāyāna or Hīnayāna, are documented as known by Ajaṇṭā's community. And, although we can surely say that bodhisattvas were worshipped at Ajaṇṭā, we cannot always be certain of their identities. Fa-Hien observes that Prajñāpāramitā, Mañjuśrī, and Avalokiteśvara were the three principle bodhisattvas

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[13] Jonathan Z. Smith. *Map is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religion.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992): 290.

[14] I-Tsing. *A Record of the Buddhist Religion as Practiced in India and the Malay Archipelago (AD 671-695).* Trans. by J. Takakusu. (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1982): 14-15.

worshipped by Mahāyānists in fifth century Mathurā.[15] Yet, at Ajaṇṭā there is but a single, very minor, female bodhisattva figure; no images at the site can be definitively identified as Mañjuśrī; and, as art historians have long noted, images of Avalokiteśvara are often difficult to distinguish from those of Maitreya, a 'Hīnayāna' bodhisattva.[16] Mitterwallner suggests that, in Mathurā at least, artists distinguished between these bodhisattvas by giving Avalokiteśvara "the hair-do of an ascetic in the form of straight hair-strands and to Maitreya long curly locks.[17] Based upon this morphology, we can say that icons of both bodhisattvas were likely donated at the site (Figs. 54, 55). This is all by way of claiming that although I-Tsing's material criteria for distinguishing the *yānas* are quite attractive, one cannot apply them to Ajaṇṭā's remains without further mediation and interpretation.

There being no certain and straightforward means for settling this issue save individuals' own affirmations of membership, let us look at what Ajaṇṭā's patrons say about themselves. As I have noted on several occasions based upon Rappaport's work, liturgical performances encode two types of information: indexical and canonical. The former provides personal information about the performer of a ritual; the latter has to do with the 'Dharma' a performer accepts through his performance. The former is found in the variant aspects of a liturgy, the most important of which is a performer's very participation therein; the latter is encoded in the invariant aspects of the liturgy. Above I also noted that Buddhist donative inscriptions are constructed with a mixture of variant and (relatively) invariant elements. One will usually find a donor's name, though, of course, the

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[15] Fa Hien. *A Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms*. Trans. by James Legge. (New York: Dover, 1965): 47.

[16] Cf. Marie-Thérèse de Mallmann. *Introduction a l'étude d'Avalokiteśvara*. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1967); Yu-min Lee. *The Maitreya Cult and its Art in Early China*. (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1983); John C. Huntington. "The Iconography and Iconology of Maitreya Images in Gandhara," *Journal of Central Asia*. 7 (1984): 133-178; M. Bussagli. "Due statuette di Maitreya," *Annali Lateranensi*. 13 (1949): 355-90; Gritli von Mitterwallner. *Kuṣāṇa Coins and Kuṣāṇa Sculptures from Mathurā*. (Mathura: The Government Museum, 1986).

[17] Mitterwallner. *Kuṣāṇa Coins and Kuṣāṇa Sculptures*, 118.

individual's name changes from record to record. Similarly, a donor will usually identify himself as a monk or lay Buddhist -- an indexical matter -- but the actual terms through which he does so carry information vis-à-vis the canons an individual patron accepted. As Fig. 53 shows, patrons had a restricted universe of epithets through which to identify themselves, their status and affiliations within the Buddhist community -- *bhadanta*, *ācārya,* *śākyabhikṣu*, *aparaśaila*, and so on -- sometimes using more than one of these indices. Similarly, one finds that Ajaṇṭā's patrons also utilized one of a number of formulae for transferring the merit created by their donations: these formulae ranged from no dedication at all, to one that gave the merit to the donor's parents, to a dedication that expressed a hope that the donor's parents, teachers, and all sentient beings would attain Buddhahood through the merit he created.

These epigraphic pericopes encode some of the various canons Ajaṇṭā's donors accepted. To understand how they have bearing for this present investigation of Dharma at Ajaṇṭā in *yānic* terms, we must turn briefly at the work of Gregory Schopen, who has attempted to document the Mahāyāna's emergence as a self-conscious institutional presence in India, defining and declaring itself publicly as a distinct entity through the unique epithets and formulae by which its members identified themselves epigraphically.[18] Schopen's historical conclusions are not our concern at present. Instead, his analysis is salient for it attempts to prove that epigraphs can be associated with the Mahāyāna even if they do not use this term explicitly.

> *deyadharmo 'yaṃ śākyabhikṣu x. yad atra puṇyaṃ tad bhavatu sarvasatvānām anuttarajñānāvāptaye*
>
> This is the religious donation of Śākyabhikṣu X. Whatever merit there is in

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[18] Cf. Gregory Schopen. "The Phrase '*sa pṛthivīpradeśaś caityabhūto bhavet*' in the *Vajracchedikā*: Notes on the Cult of the Book in Mahāyāna," *Indo-Iranian Journal.* 17 (1975): 147-181. Gregory Schopen. "Mahāyāna in Indian Inscriptions," *Indo-Iranian Journal.* 21 (1979): 1-19; Gregory Schopen. "The Inscription on the Kuṣān Image of Amitābha and the Character of the Early Mahāyāna in India," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies.* 10 (1987): 99-137.

it may that be for all beings' attainment of Unexcelled Knowledge.

Schopen holds that this may be treated as the Mahāyāna dedicatory formula in its most basic form, because, 1) "the term *śākyabhikṣu* . . . must be a title used to designate a member of the Mahāyāna community who was also a member of a monastic community,"[19] and 2) this formula for dedicating spiritual merit is "virtually the exclusive property of the Mahāyāna."[20] Although no inscription with precisely this wording or orthography is found at Ajaṇṭā, of Ajaṇṭā's 59 donative inscriptions dated to the fifth century, 23 use *Śākyabhikṣu* (or the lay equivalent, *Śākya-upāsaka*);[21] approximately 14 use a variation of this particular formula for transferring merit to foster others' attainment of Buddhahood; and 8 have both the epithet and this merit-formula. Because of the sorry state of many inscriptions at Ajaṇṭā, these numbers can by no means be taken as final. I have calculated them in order to demonstrate the large number of donors at Ajaṇṭā that could potentially be identified with the Mahāyāna based upon Schopen's epigraphic criteria.

In the semiotic terminology I have been using, Schopen is claiming that these two epigraphic pericopes index a donor's acceptance of Mahāyānist canons and, assumedly, that donor's membership in Mahāyāna. Whether Schopen's conclusions are correct, and whether Rappaportian "acceptance" is equivalent to membership, the epithet *Śākyabhikṣu* and this formula for dedicating merit were important for these donors. These two items encode canons which, if decoded, will enable us to recover a significant constituent of the Dharma of Ajaṇṭā's community. Only after we decipher those canons will it be meaningful to ask about their *yānic* status. The remainder of this chapter will focus upon these two epigraphic elements, inquiring first, what it meant for a Buddhist at Ajaṇṭā to be a *Śākya-*

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[19] Schopen. "Mahāyāna in Indian Inscriptions," 11.

[20] Schopen. "Mahāyāna in Indian Inscriptions," 12.

[21] For the remainder of the dissertation, I will use *Śākyabhikṣu* generically for the lay and monastic, male and female formulations of this title.

bhikṣu, and second what it meant for a Ś*ākyabhikṣu* to dedicate merit with the aspiration that all beings would attain of Unexcelled Knowledge.

Who Were India's Śākyabhikṣus?

As I observed at the end of the chapter on Ajaṇṭā's Saṅgha, identifications of the narratives painted on the walls of Caves 1, 16, and 17 point to a close association of this site's monastic community with the Mūlasarvāstivāda *nikāya*. Yet, because so many inscriptions dated to Ajaṇṭā's intrusive period -- indicative of people who would have remained at Ajaṇṭā at a time of uncertain patronage and looming war, i.e., people with a stake in the site -- include the epithet Ś*ākyabhikṣu* before the donor's name, we might speak of Ajaṇṭā's community as one of Ś*ākyabhikṣus*. However, neither this title, nor the lay Ś*ākya-upāsaka*, has an immediate institutional or ideological significance within Buddhism. A division of the saṅgha in terms of Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna is recognizable to most people with a passing knowledge of Buddhism; the division into 18 groupings, called *nikāyas*, based upon distinctions in doctrine and monastic rules, is familiar to scholars with a more specialized knowledge of the Buddhist sociology. But the title Ś*ākyabhikṣu*, whether it is an honorific or an institutional designation, is extremely rare in Indian Buddhist literary sources. Nevertheless, nearly 4 out of 5 of the dedications dated to Ajaṇṭā's intrusive period employ this term.

Nor is Ś*ākyabhikṣu* unique to Ajaṇṭā. To the contrary, it was used continuously in Indian Buddhist inscriptions beginning in the later fourth century at Devnī Morī in Gujarat,[22] until Buddhism's finale in India. The Ś*ākyabhikṣus* are like a community of golem, borne of and bound to the stone bearing their names, haunting. All scholars love a

[22] See Schopen ("Mahāyāna in Indian Inscriptions," 19 n. 35) for a discussion of this inscription's dating and the debate that has surrounded it.

good ghost story, and the *Śākyabhikṣus* have not been left at peace. This epithet has inspired three rather different interpretations. We have already encountered that of Gregory Schopen who, along with Masao Shizutani,[23] believes this was a title Mahāyānist monks adopted for themselves. By contrast, D. C. Sircar suggests that this epithet has no special significance, and is merely an alternate for *bhikṣu*, monk;[24] this interpretation is also found in the common Sanskrit dictionaries. H. Sarkar stands firm but alone in his opinion that the *Śākyabhikṣus* were an organization of peripatetic monks concerned with the dissemination of Buddha images, and the exaltation of Śākyamuni Buddha.[25] However, upon a reexamination of these authors' evidence and arguments, I found the interpretations of all three to be wanting. The following discussion of Ajaṇṭā's *Śākyabhikṣus* will have four stages: I will assess Sircar's and Sarkar's interpretations, then present my own decoding of the canons implicit in the epithet *Śākyabhikṣu* based upon evidence from Ajaṇṭā, and finally return to Schopen's identification of this epithet as a *yānic* index.

Sircar on Śākyabhikṣu

In his *Epigraphical Glossary*, D. C. Sircar defines "*Śākya-bhikṣu*" as an "epithet of a Buddhist monk; same as *Śākya*" and the parallel "*Śākya-opāsikā*" as "a female member of the Buddhist laity."[26] He does not elucidate further the basis for these definitions, except to say that inscriptions which use these epithets can be found in epigraphic lists compiled by

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[23] Masao Shizutani. "On the Śākyabhikṣu as Found in Indian Buddhist Inscriptions," *Indogaku Bukkyogaku Kenkyu*. 2 (1952): 104-5; Masao Shizutani. "Mahāyāna Inscriptions in the Gupta Period," *Indogaku Bukkyogaku Kenkyu*. 19 (1962): 358-355.

[24] Dinesh Chandra Sircar. *Indian Epigraphical Glossary*. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1966): 287.

[25] H. Sarkar. *Studies in Early Buddhist Architecture of India*. (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1966).

[26] Sircar. *Indian Epigraphical Glossary,* 287.

D. Bhandarkar[27] and H. Lüders.[28] Beyond these references, Sircar provides no documentation to support his interpretation. One must assume that Sircar defined this term by considering its discursive significance within the context of the inscriptions in Bhandarkar's and Lüders' lists. And thus his definitions add nothing to what we may determine regarding the *Śākyabhikṣu* epithet from Ajaṇṭā's own inscriptions. When it comes to identifying Ajaṇṭā's *Śākyabhikṣus*, reasoning based upon Sircar's *Glossary* will provide mere tautology.

Concurring in D. C. Sircar's identification, however, the *Sanskrit Wörterbuch* of Böhtlingk and Roth defines *Śākyabhikṣu* as "a Buddhist mendicant-friar;"[29] Monier-Williams agrees with this masterwork,[30] as does Apte's dictionary for students.[31] Yet, whereas the evidence Sircar cites to justify his definition little benefits our investigation, these dictionaries take us beyond the restricted world of epigraphic formulae, for they cite examples of it to be found in classical Indian literature.

Temporally and geographically, the example that comes closest to Ajaṇṭā is Varāha-mihira's *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*. This treatise on astrology and its relation to the affairs of human social life is considered to have been written in the sixth century in the city of Ujjain. The physical and historical proximity of this text to Ajaṇṭā cannot be taken too seriously,

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[27] D. R. Bhandarkar. "A List of Inscriptions of Northern India in Brāhmī and its Derivative Scripts from about 200 A.C." *Appendix to Epigraphia Indica, volumes xix-xxiii*. (Delhi: Director General, Archaeological Survey of India, 1983).

[28] Heinrich Lüders. "A List of Brāhmī Inscriptions, From the Earliest Times to about A.D. 400 with the Exception of those of Aśoka," *Appendix to Epigraphia Indica volume X*. (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1912).

[29] Otto Böhtlingk and Rudolf Roth. *Sanskrit-Wörterbuch*. (St. Petersburg, Buchdruckerei der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1875): vol. 7, 131a.

[30] Monier Monier-Williams. *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988): 1062b.

[31] Vaman Shivram Apte. *The Student's Sanskrit-English Dictionary*. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1970): 551b.

however, since Varāhamihira himself allows that his text is compiled from previous treatises on the subject. Be this as it may, the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā* root-text uses the term Ś*ākyabhikṣu* on two occasions, and once uses the shorter "Ś*ākya*," though clearly for a follower of Buddha and not for the Buddha himself. In this text's first use of Ś*ākyabhikṣu* (verse 16.15), these Buddhists are included in a list with a long list of countries, peoples, and social-groups that are presided over by the planet Mars.[32] The *Bṛhatsaṃhitā's* second use of Ś*ākyabhikṣu* also comes in the midst of a list of items associated with the planet Mars, in this case Varāhamihira indicates that association with Ś*ākyabhikṣus* on a day governed by this planet will be fruitful (verse 104.61).[33] In a third instance, Varāhamihira's root text says that "Ś*ākyas*" are responsible for installing Buddha images (verse 60.19).[34] In none of these instances do we find any reason to determine that Ś*ākyabhikṣu* is being used in a meaning other for generic Buddhist-monks. This identification is made even stronger in Bhaṭṭotpala's commentary on verse 16.15 noted above. For Varāhamihira's "Ś*ākyabhikṣu*," Bhaṭṭotpala glosses: "a ś*ākya* is one who wears red-robes; a *bhikṣu* is an ascetic" (ś*ākyo raktapaṭikaḥ* | *bhikṣur yatiḥ* |). In the second instance, the commentator glosses Ś*ākyabhikṣu* as "a kind of ascetic" (ś*ramaṇaka*). Elsewhere (verse 87.69) Bhaṭṭotpala interprets the root-text's "ś*ramaṇa*" (alternately "ś*ravaṇa*")[35] as "Ś*ākyabhikṣu*."[36] Still

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[32] Varāhamihira. *Bṛhatsaṃhitā, with the commentary of Bhaṭṭotpala*. (Varanasi: Varanaseya Sanskrit Vishvavidyalaya, 1968): 279-80; Varāhamihira. *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*. Ed. and trans. by M. Ramakrishna Bhat. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1981): 195.

[33] Varāhamihira. *Bṛhatsaṃhitā, with commentary,* 1108; Varāhamihira. *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*, 928.

[34] Varāhamihira. *Bṛhatsaṃhitā, with commentary,* 705; Varāhamihira. *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*, 571.

[35] There is a problem in drawing further conclusions from this evidence vis-a-vis the generic use of ś*ramaṇa* for "Buddhist." The two editions I cite differ in that in some instances the "ś*ramaṇa*" of Bhat's edition is "ś*ravaṇa*" in the edition which includes Bhaṭṭotpala's commentary. These two terms have very different resonances in Buddhist discourse, which must be left aside because I do not reexamine the actual manuscripts from which my two editions derive.

[36] Varāhamihira. *Bṛhatsaṃhitā, with commentary,* 932; Varāhamihira. *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*, 792.

elsewhere (verse 87.9), *śramaṇa/śravaṇa* is glossed as "Buddhist" (*bauddha*).[37] Putting all these equivalences together, between Varāhamihira and his commentator we get the following list of synonyms: *bauddha* = *śākyabhikṣu* = *śākya* = *raktapaṭika* = *śramaṇa* = *śravaṇa* (Buddhist = śākya-monk = śākya = wearer of red-robes = ascetic = auditor). It would seem that for Varāhamihira and his commentator Bhaṭṭotpala, India's *Śākyabhikṣus* were indistinguishable from India's Buddhist monks.

Varāhamihira's shortening of *Śākyabhikṣu* to *Śākya* in verse 60.19 finds a complement in the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* (verse 2.3.14.38), where the "*Śākyas*" are said to have been created by the Asuras along with other heretical groups "like Vṛddhaśrāvakīs, Nirgranthas, Śākyas, Jīvaskas and Kārpaṭas."[38] Similarly, in Kauṭilīya's *Arthaśāstra*, the "*Śākyas*" are named as a heretic sect whose monks may not be fed at rites for gods and ancestors; violation of this rule carries a 100 *paṇa* fine (verse 3.20.16).[39] And again, the "*Śākyabhikṣuka*" are identified as one of a number of heretics in the commentary supplied by Kullūka's *Manvarthamuktāvali* on verse 4.30 of the *Manusmṛti*.[40]

Another literary text in which *Śākyabhikṣu* is found is Daṇḍin's *Daśakumāracarita*. Here it is used to describe a Buddhist nun: "Then I won over Dharmarakṣitā, a Buddhist female mendicant (*Śākyabhikṣukī*), the chief agent of Kāmamañjarī, with gifts of old garments, food, and the like."[41] Again, little in this description suggests that Dharma-

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[37] Varāhamihira. *Bṛhatsaṃhitā, with commentary,* 925; Varāhamihira. *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*, 786.

[38] Ganesh Vasudeo Tagare (trans). *The Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa; part II.* Ancient Indian Tradition and Mythology series vol. 23. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983): 541.

[39] Kauṭilīya. *The Kauṭilīya Arthaśāstra*. Ed. by R. P. Kangle. (Bombay: University of Bombay, 1969) vol. 1, 127.

[40] Manu. *Manu-Smṛtiḥ:, with nine commentaries by Medhātīthi, Sarvajñanārāyaṇa, Kullūka, Rāghavānanda, Nandana, Rāmacandra, Maṇirāma, Govindarāja, Bhāruci.* Ed. by Jayantakrishna Harikrishna Dave. (Bombay: Bharat Vidya Bhavan, 1975), vol. 2, 316.

[41] *tataś ca kāṃcit kāmamañjaryāḥ pradhānadūtīṃ dharmarakṣitāṃ nāma śākyabhikṣukīṃ cīvarapiṇḍadānādinopasaṃgṛhya.* Daṇḍin. *The Daśakumāracarita of Daṇḍin*. Ed. by M. R. Kale. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986): 60, 85.

rakṣitā is being described as a member of a Buddhist sub-sect through Daṇḍin's use of *Śākyabhikṣukī.* The commentary Kale publishes along with the *Daśakumāracarita's* root text provides an interesting gloss, which seems to sew up Sircar, et. al.'s position: "A *Śākyabhikṣukī is* a female ascetic [who espouses] Buddhist tenets. But a '*śākya,*' [can be] any Buddhist."[42] Unfortunately, Kale gives no information whatsoever concerning the provenance, dating, or authorship of this commentary. It could come from the eighth century or the eighteenth, and so cannot be treated as a definitive statement in regard to Ajaṇṭā's Buddhist monks.

Still another example from classical Indian literature is found in the *Mattavilāsa Prahasanam.*[43] This dramatic work was authored in the first quarter of the seventh century by the Pallava King Mahendravarman I, who ruled much of southern India from his capital at Kāñcī. A farce, the *Mattavilāsa* depicts an encounter between Satyasoma, a *Kapālin* -- a type of Śaivite renunciate whose practice involves drinking alcohol from a *kapāla*, a human skull -- and a Buddhist monk named Nāgasena. In brief, Satyasoma, intoxicated, is unable to find his *kapāla*, and so returns to a liquor shop he had patronized earlier in the day. At the moment Satyasoma returns, enter Nāgasena, holding his begging-bowl full of food from a patron's feast under his robe. Satyasoma accuses the Buddhist monk of having stolen his *kapāla*; Nāgasena decries his innocence, but will not show his bowl, claiming that the Buddha ordered monks to keep their bowls concealed when full. A Pāśupata and madman soon appear and attempt to mediate between the Kapālin and Buddhist. I won't give away the conclusion of this farce in one act. For the purpose of recovering cliches by which Buddhism was known to contemporary communities, the *Mattavilāsa* is of great

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[42] *śākyabhikṣukīṃ bauddhasiddhāntatapasvinīṃ* | *śākyas tu bauddheṣv anyatamaḥ iti* Daṇḍin. *Daśakumāracarita,* 85.

[43] Mahendravikramavarman. *Mattavilāsaprahasana.* Ed. and trans. by N. P. Unni. (Trivandrum: College Book House, 1974).

interest: the two truths, the Three Jewels, the six perfections, and the many restrictions on monastic behavior all come in for ridicule. For the present purpose, however, what is most crucial is that in identification of the characters, the Buddhist monk Nāgasena is referred to as a Ś*ākyabhikṣu.*

As in the previous two examples there is no internal basis upon which to make a determination concerning whether the *Mattavilāsa Prahasanam's* use of ś*ākyabhikṣu* has any significance beyond 'Buddhist monk.' Unlike the other two works, however, we have slightly more evidence. Hsüan-Tsang himself travelled as far south as Kāñcī, and spent considerable time there in approximately 640 C.E. hoping to gain passage to Sri Lanka. Mahendravarman I's son was ruling then, but there is little reason to assume that any significant alterations occurred in the Buddhist saṅgha of this city as a result of that change. Hsüan-Tsang provides the first evidence to suggest that India's Ś*ākyabhikṣus* could be anything other than its generic Buddhist monks. For the Chinese pilgrim notes that Buddhism was quite prominent in this city, there being nearly one hundred monasteries and 10,000 monks. More significant yet, Hsüan-Tsang observed that all of Kāñcī's monks "study the teaching of the Sthavira school belonging to the Great Vehicle."[44] The presence of the Mahāyāna in Kāñcī is further supported by the *Mattavilāsa's* mention of two doctrines associated predominantly with this *yāna.* First, after Nāgasena refuses to show the *Kapālin* Satyasoma his bowl which he conceals under his robe, Satyasoma puns: "this is the concealed [i.e., relative] truth, I wish to hear the ultimate truth."[45] A clear reference to the doctrine of the two-truths, often associated with the name of Nāgārjuna. Second, after Nāgasena becomes so fed up with Satyasoma's shenanigans that the monk

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[44] Hsüan-Tsang. *Si-Yu Ki: Buddhist Records of the Western World, translated from the Chinese of Hiuen Tsiang (A.D. 629).* Trans. by Samuel Beal. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1981): vol. 2, 229.

[45] *idaṃ tat saṃvṛtasatyam* | *paramārthasatyaṃ* ś*rotum icchāmi* | Mahendravikramavarman. *Mattavilāsaprahasana*, 52.

offers the Kapālin the bowl, Satyasoma quips: "Most probably this is how the Buddha fulfilled the Perfection of Giving."[46] On the same note, hearkening back to the commentary on Varāhamihira's *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*, we will see that, according to Bhaṭṭotpala, *Śākyas* install an image of the Buddha following the method of the Perfections (*pāramitākrāmeṇa*):[47] another suggestion of linkage between the *Śākya* epithet and the Mahāyāna.

This evidence certainly is more lively than the inevitable repetitiveness of epigraphic formulae. And, as I stated above, I will return to the question of *yānas* below. Still it is not conclusive, for the Ujjain of Varāhamihira was also visited by Hsüan-Tsang, where he found only three hundred monks, belonging to both the Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna. Were only Mahāyānist Buddhists, *Śākyabhikṣus*, auspicious on days ruled by Mars? Was the power of the Indian planetary gods subordinate to the internal skirmishes of heretic Buddhists?

A more reasonable way of viewing the evidence reviewed to this point is suggested by a quip Satyasoma makes in the *Mattavilāsa Prahasanam.* At one point, Satyasoma accuses Nāgasena of performing magic, of changing the color of his *kapāla* skull from white to black. In his words, Nāgasena is capable of this act for he is "truly the progeny of Māyā's son."[48] This pun works because *Māyā* can mean 'illusion' as well as being the proper name of the Buddha's mother. Nāgasena the *Śākyabhikṣu* is the son of the son of Māyā. Whereas, this particular phrasing is unique to Mahendravarman's play, it echoes a common epithet used for Buddhist monks throughout their own literature: *śākyaputrīya śramaṇa,* which can be translated as the mendicant sons (or followers) of

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[46] *nūnam evaṃ buddhenāpi dānapāramitā pūritā* | Mahendravikramavarman. *Mattavilāsaprahasana*, 60.

[47] Varāhamihira. *Bṛhatsaṃhitā, with commentary,* 705.

[48] *nanu māyāsantānasambhavāḥ khalu bhavantaḥ* | Mahendravikramavarman. *Mattavilāsaprahasana*, 60.

the son of the Ś*ākyas*. Ś*ākyabhikṣu* can be viewed as having its parentage in this common designation for Buddhist monks. Moreover, ś*ākyaputrīya* ś*ramaṇa* seems not to have been a title by which members of the Buddha's saṅgha described themselves or referred to their own members. Generalizing from the Pāli canon, S. Dutt writes, "It will be observed that in the legends of the (Theravāda) Canon, the name by which outsiders designate the *Bhikkhusaṅgha* is always 'Sakyaputtiya Samaṇas.'"[49] And turning from Pāli literature to the Mūlasarvāstivādin texts, one finds a similar pattern. Although my survey of the MSV on this point has not been particularly exhaustive or meticulous, in the instances I have noted the phrase ś*ākyaputrīya* ś*ramaṇa* it always expresses a lay-man's view of the saṅgha. In the one instance where a monk uses this epithet, he is using indirect speech for a lay-man.[50]

To conclude this section, the evidence presented so far suggests that non-Buddhist literary sources can be read as using the term Ś*ākyabhikṣu* in precisely the way D. C. Sircar claims, as a generic term for Buddhist monk. If so, it is not unreasonable to view it as a development or echo of the ś*ākyaputrīya* ś*ramaṇa* found so often in Buddhist literature. Still there is a large distinction to be drawn between these two means for identifying members of the Buddhist saṅgha. Whereas ś*ākyaputrīya* ś*ramaṇa* is often found in Buddhist literature, I have not discovered a single instance of its use in Buddhist epigraphs, our principle source of references to Ś*ākyabhikṣus*. And whereas ś*ākyaputrīya* ś*ramaṇa* is typically used by lay folk for members of the Buddha's saṅgha, the epigraphic use of Ś*ākyabhikṣu* almost invariably occurs in donors' self-descriptions. In short, one will have to conclude that either Ś*ākyabhikṣu* is merely an insider's equivalent for ś*ākyaputrīya* ś*ramaṇa* or that sometime in the fourth-century certain monks started referring to themselves as Ś*ākyabhikṣus* for an as-yet unstated reason, and for some

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[49] Sukumar Dutt. *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries of India*. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988): 35, n. 5.

[50] Nalinaksha Dutt (ed). *Gilgit Manuscripts*. (Delhi: Sri Satguru, 1984): vol. 3.1, 80.

reason, also as-yet unstated, this epithet became disseminated within the broader population of India as a generic reference for Buddhist monks.

Sarkar on Śākyabhikṣu

The above study of references to Ś*ākyabhikṣus* in India's classical literature left ambiguous whether this epithet refers generically to Buddhist monks or to a distinct group within the saṅgha; and whether, if the latter, that group may have gained such prominence that, by the time of Varāhamihira's *Bṛhatsaṃhitā* its name became generic for the Buddhist monks. In any event, we can be certain of the solution opted for by Sircar and the authors of Sanskrit dictionaries. One scholar who rejected their conclusions is H. Sarkar. He writes, "It may be argued that Ś*ākya-bhikṣus* need not be distinguished as a distinct group of monks. But the Ś*ākya-bhikṣus* have always been differentiated from other monks or *bhikṣus*."[51]

For Sarkar, India's Ś*ākyabhikṣus* were not only institutionally distinct within the *caturdiśa bhikṣusaṅgha,* they also had "a definite ideal and mission."[52] Namely, the Ś*ākyabhikṣus* were "interested in offering the image of Buddha to different Buddhist *saṅgha*."[53] Sarkar hypothesizes that in order to realize this practice, "the Ś*ākya-bhikṣus* formed a compact group by itself with a central *saṅgha* guiding the activities of the individual monks stationed in different parts of India."[54] One of those different parts of India -- in fact, given that it has the single largest cache of Ś*ākyabhikṣu* inscriptions, the most important part -- would have been the Ajaṇṭā caves. Indeed, one crucial piece of

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[51] Sarkar. *Studies in Early Buddhist Architecture,* 106.

[52] Sarkar. *Studies in Early Buddhist Architecture,* 107.

[53] Sarkar. *Studies in Early Buddhist Architecture,* 106.

[54] Sarkar. *Studies in Early Buddhist Architecture,* 106.

evidence Sarkar cites to substantiate his claim is a verse that was included within two dedicatory inscriptions at Ajaṇṭā. Found in Cave 10 (app. A, No. 52) and Cave 22 (No. 90), this verse, in Sarkar's words, "expresses the view point of the Ś*ākya-bhikṣus*:"[55]

> Those who have an image of the Conqueror made
> In this [very life] become possessed of
> Beauty, fortune, and good qualities;
> Blazing like the sun in their faculties and senses,
> They become a delight to the eye.

Sarkar's claim must be considered seriously. His interpretation is based principally upon epigraphic and art-historical evidence, and thus is more appropriate for the study of Ajaṇṭā than the examples from literary works cited above. If acceptable, Sarkar's conception of the Ś*ākyabhikṣu* will assist us in addressing the significance of Ś*ākyabhikṣu* at Ajaṇṭā itself, one of the "different cave monasteries" in which "Ś*ākyabhikṣus* made a concerted effort to introduce image-worship."[56]

Sarkar's argument has two stages. First he sets out to demonstrate that India's Ś*ākyabhikṣus* were a distinct organization; second, he discusses the ideals and mission of this group. The evidence he proposes through which one "can easily visualize the oneness of this community"[57] includes an argument based upon the names of individual Ś*ākyabhikṣus*. Sarkar finds that these names have "common links," they appear to be names "conferred by the *saṅgha*," and "in the majority of cases followed a definite pattern."[58] I will set this point aside, as Sarkar's argument is completely unconvincing. A second way Sarkar hopes to establish that the Ś*ākyabhikṣus* were a separate group is by comparing the use of 'Ś*ākyabhikṣu*' with that of '*bhikṣu*' within inscriptions: there are

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[55] Sarkar. *Studies in Early Buddhist Architecture,* 107.

[56] Sarkar. *Studies in Early Buddhist Architecture,* 107.

[57] Sarkar. *Studies in Early Buddhist Architecture,* 106.

[58] Sarkar. *Studies in Early Buddhist Architecture,* 106.

epigraphic records that draw a distinction between Ś*ākyabhikṣu* donors and those who are mere *bhikṣus*; and even after "the term Ś*ākya-bhikṣu* must have attained considerable popularity" there are still inscriptions in which "a Buddhist monk is simply referred to as *bhikṣu*."[59] In other words, Sarkar claims the Ś*ākyabhikṣus*' were a separate group within the saṅgha because the use of this epithet appears to have been a matter of choice, and therefore encoded a set of canons which some Buddhist monks accepted and some did not.

This argument parallels my own in terms of its reasoning, but the evidence Sarkar uses for support is quite problematic. To establish his point, Sarkar cites only a single example wherein Ś*ākyabhikṣu* and *bhikṣu* occur in the same inscription. Not only is his evidence sparse, but Sarkar does not adequately assess the suitability of this one inscription. He appears not to have looked at the actual record upon which he bases the assertion that "Ś*ākya-bhikṣus* have always been differentiated from other monks or *bhikṣus*,"[60] Sarkar refers to this epigraph solely according to the information contained in Lüders' list: "Moreover no. 134 of Lüders' draws a line of distinction between the *bhikṣu* Buddharakṣita and a Ś*ākya-bhikṣu* whose name is now missing."[61] Lüders' list refers to readings made by R. Mitra, J. Dowson, and Lüders himself.[62] Were these reconstructions correct, this would be the earliest use of Ś*ākyabhikṣu* by several centuries. However, Lüders subsequently re-edited this record and pronounced his and the other scholars'

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[59] Sarkar. *Studies in Early Buddhist Architecture,* 107.

[60] Sarkar. *Studies in Early Buddhist Architecture,* 106.

[61] Sarkar. *Studies in Early Buddhist Architecture,* 107.

[62] Lüders. "A List of Brāhmī Inscriptions," 23, #134.

reading of "ś*ākyabhikṣu*" an "arbitrary alteration."[63] Lüders instead presents this as one of four separate records inscribed onto the torus and square-base of a pillar discovered in Mathurā all of which refer to a gift made by a *bhikṣu* named Buddharakṣita who was a 'Vaḍakṣa' or 'Vaṇḍakṣa' (possibly meaning an inhabitant of Bactria in northern Afghanistan), but not a 'Ś*ākyabhikṣu*.'[64]

Although Sarkar reached his conclusion through a single wrong example, there is at least one instance -- not noted by Sarkar -- where Ś*ākyabhikṣu* and *bhikṣu* do occur in the same record. This is the Devnī Morī casket inscription, possibly the earliest extant use of Ś*ākyabhikṣu*.[65] Two monks, named Agnivarman and Sudarśana, are said to have built the Great Stūpa at Devnī Morī, and two monks, named Pāśāntika and Palla, to have supervised the laborers: all four monks are called 'Ś*ākyabhikṣu*' in this verse inscription. A fifth monk, Mahāsena, called '*bhikṣu*' in the epigraph, commissioned the casket in which the Buddha's relic was placed. This record would seem to support Sarkar's conclusions quite nicely. However, because the record is in verse, we cannot say for certain whether Mahāsena is designated '*bhikṣu*' because of meter rather than an institutional affiliation. All in all, lacking the Rappaportian spin whereby epithets are treated as public indices of acceptance, this epigraphic evidence for the Ś*ākyabhikṣus* being a separate group is not overly compelling.

After 'proving' the Ś*ākyabhikṣus* were a distinct entity, Sarkar wants to claim they possessed "a definite ideal and mission." The inscription from Devnī Morī provides an entre onto the canons that Sarkar proposes were associated with the Ś*ākyabhikṣus*.

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[63] Heinrich Lüders. *Mathurā Inscriptions*. Ed. by Klaus L. Janert. Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen. Philologisch-Historische Klasse. ser. 3. no. 47. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1961): 76.

[64] Lüders. *Mathurā Inscriptions*, 75-77, #39-40.

[65] R. N. Mehta and S. N. Chowdhary. *Excavation at Devni Mori*. (Baroda: Department of Archaeology and Ancient History, 1966): 121.

Though we know little of the beliefs or interests of Devnī's Morī's *Śākyabhikṣus* beyond their obvious devotion to Buddha, the *bhikṣu* Mahāsena is said to personally desire the Buddha's grace (*sugataprasādakāma*), but his reason for commissioning this casket was "in order to augment the Dharma and the Saṅgha" (*vṛddhyarthan dharmma-saṃghyābhyām*). One might differentiate this *bhikṣu* from Devnī Morī's *Śākyabhikṣus* because Mahāsena's interest is divided between the Three Jewels, whereas the work of Agnivarman, Sudarśana, Pāśāntika, and Palla is centered on the Buddha alone. As I said, Sarkar does not discuss this inscription; and the interpretation I have just presented seems a bit far-fetched. But it does capture what Sarkar views as the heart of the *Śākyabhikṣu* movement: "the emergence of the *Śākya-bhikṣus* as a distinct group was possibly the outcome of a trend which aimed at popularizing the image of *Śākya-muni*" and "not only populariz[ing] the anthropomorphic form of Buddha but also the oblong shrines,"[66] and perhaps even free-standing stūpas like that at Devnī Morī.

This claim of Sarkar's is reasonable so far as it goes. A decisive majority of the inscriptions bearing the epithet *Śākyabhikṣu* are attached to images of a Buddha; the verse found in Ajaṇṭā's Caves 10 and 22 cited above does highlight the efficacy of making a Buddha image; the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā's* verse 59.19 cited above does specify that *Śākyas* are responsible for the installation of Buddha images. Nevertheless, Sarkar is again demonstrating a distinct lack of depth in his investigation. Though most of the donations made by *Śākyabhikṣus* appear to have been Buddha-images, to my knowledge in no case is the Buddha ever identified as *Śākyamuni* himself. Even leaving that point aside, at Ajaṇṭā one finds two bodhisattva images that were donated by *Śākyabhikṣus*, one being an *Aṣṭa-mahābhaya* Avalokiteśvara in Cave Upper 6 (app. A, No. 18), the other, probably Maitreya, is found in Cave 9 (app A. No. 32; Fig. 54). Similarly, an inscription dated to 506 C.E. makes

[66] Sarkar. *Studies in Early Buddhist Architecture,* 107.

mention of a Mahāyānist *Śākyabhikṣu* teacher named Śāntideva for whom a Gupta ruler named Vainyagupta was building the 'Ārya Avalokiteśvara's Hermitage' monastery.[67] Even though this particular inscription records Vainyagupta's donation of a village to supply perfume, flowers, and so on for the performance of pūjā to the Buddha in particular, the name of Śāntideva's monastery gives a clear indication of this *Śākyabhikṣu's* personal orientation. Finally, in addition to images of Buddha, we find the *Śākyabhikṣu* epithet in connection with the donation of a railing post,[68] a bell,[69] and a pillar.[70]

The image associated with inscription No. 96 provides still further insight into the Buddho-philic nature of the *Śākyabhikṣus*. Fig. 56 shows that despite the Buddha's miraculous powers, two Buddha images cannot occupy the same physical space. Apparently, one anonymous intrusive donor paid for an image of a seated Buddha to be carved on the right wall of Cave 26's ambulatory. After this Buddha was outlined, however, a second standing Buddha was cut directly over it. This second Buddha was the donation of the *Śākyabhikṣu* Saṅghamitra. We cannot be certain of the chain of events that led to this intrusive layering of Buddhas, but clearly this *Śākyabhikṣu* had no scruples about the desecration of a roughed-out Buddha-form. One should be aware, however, that whereas decorative motifs and incomplete Buddha-images were subject to intrusive depredations, at Ajaṇṭā no fully realized Buddhas were violated thus.

Now, even supposing that Śākyamuni Buddha was clearly the object of every

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[67] Dinesh Chandra Bhattacharya. "A Newly Discovered Copperplate from Tippera, The Gunaighar Grant of Vainyagupta: The Year 188 Current (Gupta Era)," *Indian Historical Quarterly*. 6 (1930): 45-60, 561, 572.

[68] Daya Ram Sahni. *Catalogue of the Museum of Archaeology at Sarnath*. (Delhi: Indological Book House, 1972): 212, D(*a*)18.

[69] E. H. Johnston. "Some Sanskrit Inscriptions of Arakan," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*. 11 (1943-46): 382.

[70] Sahni. *Catalogue of the Museum of Archaeology at Sarnath,* 239, D(*f*)2.

reverential *Śākyabhikṣu* donation, one would still wonder about Sarkar's claim that merely because the objects bearing the *Śākyabhikṣu* imprimatur are Buddha images, this group of Buddhists was dedicated specifically to the dissemination of Buddha images. Invariably at Ajaṇṭā, the dedicatory inscriptions of *Śākyabhikṣus* begin, "*deyadharmmo 'yam*;" the simplest form of a *Śākyabhikṣu* inscription reads, as in app. A, No. 96, *deyadharmmo 'yaṃ śākyabhikṣo saṃghamitrasya,* "This is the religious donation of the *Śākyabhikṣu* Saṅghamitra." The *Śākyabhikṣus*' Buddha images are all referred to as *deyadharmas*, yet Sarkar does not inquire into the significance of this term. Indeed, through a cursory survey of Buddhist inscriptions one finds that *deyadharma* did not necessarily designate a Buddha-image. Other inscriptions refer to a *deyadharma* of two cisterns at Kuḍa,[71] and at Bedsa another cistern,[72] a cave at Śailarwadi,[73] at Karle a *maithuna* sculpture,[74] and a pillar base at Mathurā.[75] This list is far from exhaustive.

Within Buddhist literature too, *deyadharmas* could be items other than Buddha images. In the *Mahāvastu,* the Licchavis of Vaiśālī feed the Buddha and his monks for one week, a gift described as a *deyadharma;*[76] later in this same text the Buddha thanks Uruvilvā-Kāśyapa for his *deyadharma* of a meal.[77] In the Lokottara-Mahāsāṅghika *Abhisamācārikā,* the gift lay donors provide monks on the occasion of the Poṣadha ceremony

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[71] James Burgess. *Report on the Buddhist Cave Temples and their Inscriptions.* (Varanasi: Bharatiya Publishing House, 1975): 84, #3.

[72] Burgess. *Report on the Buddhist Cave Temples*, 90, #3.

[73] Burgess. *Report on the Buddhist Cave Temples*, 92, #19.

[74] Burgess. *Report on the Buddhist Cave Temples*, 91, #13.

[75] Lüders. *Mathurā Inscriptions*, 82, #46.

[76] J. J. Jones (trans). *The Mahāvastu.* (London: Pāli Text Society, 1987): vol 1, 246.

[77] Jones. *The Mahāvastu*, vol 3, 427.

is alternately referred to as *dakṣiṇā* and *deyadharma.*[78] In this text the precise material objects that could be included within the laity's *deyadharma* are not specified. But the *Mahāniddesa* and *Cullaniddesa* of the Pāli canon both contain a list of fourteen items that could be given to monks as *deyadharma:* robes, cooked food, lodging, medicine, rice, water, clothing, carriages, garlands, perfumes, unguents, beds, dwellings, or lamps.[79] Clearly at some point Buddha-images and a range of other items were added to the list.

Moving to the Mūlasarvāstivādin sphere, the *Divyāvadāna's* narrative of King Aśoka tells that as a boy in previous life this emperor placed a handful of dirt in the Buddha's bowl. His glorious birth as Aśoka resulted from this "*deyadharma.*"[80] In the MSV, *kaṭhina* robes, given at the ceremony to celebrate the end of the rainy season, are described as the *deyadharmas* of donors.[81] And in the MSV, one even finds a 'spiritualizing' of the term, whereby it becomes associated with the meritorious intention underlying a gift rather than the material object itself. For instance, when the Buddha is injured by a fragment of rock, a young girl is requested by the Jīvaka the physician to donate milk as medicine to stop his hemorrhage. Although her milk proves insufficient medicine, the Buddha prophecies that she will become a Pratyekabuddha as a result of her act: "The Blessed One said, Ānanda, did you see that young woman who gave milk after conceiving faith in me? I saw her, Sir. Ānanda, this young woman will become a Pratyekabuddha named Kṣīraprada because of this root of merit, aspiration, and giving of a

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[78] Sanghasen Singh and Kenryo Minowa. "A Critical Edition and Translation of the *Abhisamācārikā Nāma Bhikṣuprakīrṇakaḥ* (Chapter One)," *Buddhist Studies* 12 (1988): 81-146.

[79] T. W. Rhys Davids and William Stede. *The Pāli Text Society's Pāli-English Dictionary.* (London: Pāli Text Society, 1986): 329a.

[80] Edward Byles Cowell and R. A. Neil (eds). *The Divyāvadāna.* (Delhi: Indological Book House, 1987): 369.

[81] Dutt. *Gilgit Manuscripts*, vol. 3.2, 152.

deyadharma. Her *deyadharma* was just this: the conception of faith in me."[82]

The simple fact is, *deyadharmas* in the form of painted and sculpted Buddha images, cave monasteries, cisterns, and pillars, have far greater permanence than *deya-dharmas* such as food, clothing, and medicine, let alone the conception of faith. Sarkar's argument that because the dedicatory inscriptions that use the epithet Ś*ākyabhikṣu* are most found with images of the Buddha, the Ś*ākyabhikṣus' raison d'etre* was the dissemination of Buddha images is made from negative evidence: an unacceptable mode of archaeological argumentation, for it ignores the variable rate at which artifacts of material culture decay. Surely, as Buddhabhadra's Cave 26 inscription says, "a memorial enduring as the moon and sun should be made in the mountains" (verse 8). But one cannot expect that all memorials or *deyadharmas* of Ś*ākyabhikṣus* would have been so permanent.

I conclude this section with a lament for Sarkar's sloppy investigation of India's Ś*ākyabhikṣus*. Despite my criticisms of his methods, evidence, and conclusions, there is much of interest in his discussion. In point of fact, the starting point for my own analysis comes very close that of Sarkar: "there might be some direct or indirect relationship between the terms Ś*ākya-muni* and Ś*ākya-bhikṣu*" and the "emergence of the Ś*ākya-bhikṣus* as a distinct group was the outcome of a trend which aimed at . . . emphasizing the importance of the Śākya-clan."[83] The 'Ś*ākya*' of Ś*ākyabhikṣu* is, after all, this epithet's first peculiarity and its most evident innovation. It is the point from which my own investigation into the canons this epithet encodes will commence.

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[82] *bhagavān āha dṛṣṭā tvayā ānanda sā dārikā, yayā mamāntike cittam abhiprasādya kṣīram dattam? dṛṣṭā bhadanta; eṣā sā ānanda dārikā anena kuśalamūlena cittotpādena deyadharmaparityāgena ca kṣīraprado nāma pratyekabuddho bhaviṣyati; ayam asyā deyadharmo yo mamāntike cittaprāsādaḥ iti* Raniero Gnoli (ed). *The Gilgit Manuscript of the* Ś*ayanāsanavastu and the Adhikaraṇavastu, Being the 15th and 16th Sections of the Vinaya of the Mūlasarvāstivādin.* (Rome: Instituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1978): vol. 2, 173.

[83] Sarkar. *Studies in Early Buddhist Architecture,* 107.

Towards Identifying Ajaṇṭā's Śākyabhikṣus

To identify Ajaṇṭā's *Śākyabhikṣus* (and *Śākya-upāsakas*), the place to begin is with the epithet itself. *Bhikṣu* and *upāsaka* mean monk and lay devotee respectively, and offer little grist for the interpretative mill. The prefix *Śākya* is, of course, the name of the Buddha's family.

On the face of it, this familial designation is clear enough. As a prefix, *Śākya* is first attested in the Rummindei pillar inscription of Emperor Aśoka; found in Lumbini, this inscription claims to demarcate the birth-site of "Sakyamuni Buddha."[84] Whereas *Śākyamuni* (Sage of the Śākyas) is the most common context for this prefix, the MSV's formula for ordination into the Buddhist saṅgha is rather productive in its use of *Śākya*. The entrant recites: "I follow in renunciation the Blessed One, Tathāgata, Arhat, Complete and Perfect Buddha Śākyamuni, the Lion of the Śākyas (*Śākyasiṃha*), the Overlord of the Śākyas (*Śākyādhirāja*)."[85] Indeed, within the MSV *Śākya* is used almost exclusively for members of the Buddha's family. The Buddha's cousin, Devadatta, is called "one paṇḍit of the Śākyas"[86] by the heretic teacher Pūraṇa Kaśyapa. When the Buddha receives the Nyagrodha monastery in Kapilavastu from his father, he dedicates the merit to the Śākyas using a formula that resonates with many found at Ajaṇṭā.[87] As part of a series of verses

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[84] E. Hultzsch. *Inscriptions of Aśoka*. Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, volume 1. (New Delhi: Director General, Archaeological Survey of India, 1991): 164; Alfred C. Woolner. *Aśoka Text and Glossary*. (Delhi: Panjab University Oriental Publications, 1982): 51.

[85] *bcom ldan 'das de bshin gzhegs pa dgra bcom pa yang dag par rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas shākya thub pa | shākya'i seng ge | shākya'i rgyal po gtso bo de rab tu byung ba'i rjes su rab tu 'byung ste* (Derge Ka 50[b]6-7)

[86] *ekaḥ śākyānāṃ paṇditaḥ* Raniero Gnoli (ed). *The Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabhedavastu, Being the 17th and last Section of the Vinaya of the Mūlasarvāstivādin*. (Rome: Instituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1977): vol. 2, 256.

[87] "Whatever merit [comes] from this gift, let it go to the Śākyas. May they obtain an eternal place or cherished desires." *ito dānād dhi yat puṇyaṃ tac chākyān upagacchatu | prāpnuvantu padaṃ nityam īpsitān vā manorathān || iti* Gnoli. *Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabhedavastu*, vol. 1, 199.

wherein monks recount past acts that resulted in their rebirth at the time of Śākyamuni Buddha, one named Śaivala notes his good fortune for being born in the Ś*ākyakula,* the Śākya family;[88] a second is glad for his birth in the Ś*ākyarājakula,* the family of the Śākya kings.[89] And the full line of those Śākya kings is recited at the beginning of the MSV's *Saṅghabhedavastu* by Mahāmaudgalyāyana, after which the Buddha states: "It is fitting for a faithful renunciate, a son of good family, to preserve, accept, and recite the religious discourse on the subject of the ancient succession of the Śākya family."[90] As yet one more example, just before the nun Utpalavarṇā is struck and killed by Devadatta, she states that he should not harm her for he is the Blessed One's brother as well as a renunciate from the Ś*ākya* family.[91]

This last instance is particularly interesting, for Utpalavarṇā's wording, ś*ākyakulād pravrajitaḥ,* is equivalent to a phrase we have encountered before, in this dissertation's Saṅgha chapter. As one will recall, at the beginning of the MSV's Ś*ayanāsanavastu* the monks of Śrāvastī argue among themselves as to which monk is the most worthy: the first answer offered is ś*ākyaḥ pravrajitaḥ*, a Śākya renunciate, followed by suggestions of the brāhmaṇa renunciate, and so on through the four castes, then a renunciate from a wealthy family, one with great learning, and so on. Clearly, not all Buddhist monks are Śākya renunciates. The Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya reveals in these and numerous other instances a conscious awareness within the Buddhist saṅgha of there being certain monks who were

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[88] Dutt. *Gilgit Manuscripts,* vol. 3.1, 191.

[89] Dutt. *Gilgit Manuscripts,* vol. 3.1, 208.

[90] *yuktam eva bhikṣavaḥ* ś*raddhayā pravrajitena kulaputreṇa* ś*ākyānāṃ paurāṇaṃ kulavaṃ*ś*am ārabhya dharmyām kathāṃ dhārayitum grāhayituṃ vācayitum* Gnoli. *Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabhedavastu*, vol. 1, 32-3.

[91] *sā praghātyamānā karuṇadīnavilapitair akṣarair uvāca: ārya* ś*āntaṃ kim aham evaṃ kariṣye? tvaṃ tāvad bhagavato bhrātā punaḥ* ś*ākyakulād pravrajitaḥ*; Gnoli. *Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabhedavastu*, vol. 2, 254.

members of the Śākyakula (Śākya family) or Śākyavaṃśa (Śākya lineage), who could claim a direct familial relationship to Śākyamuni Buddha, and who thought themselves to be deserving of special recognition for that reason.

This phrase, *Śākya-pravrajita*, is particularly interesting and significant because *pravrajita* and *bhikṣu* are synonyms. A third synonym is *śramaṇa*. And I have already introduced the secondary nominal formation *śākyaputrīya śramaṇa*, which literally means a follower of a *Śākyaputra*, this latter being the Buddha himself.[92] Whereas the MSV's *Śākyapravrajitas* were the Buddha's kin, there is no direct implication that Buddhist monks as *śākyaputrīya śramaṇas* were Śākyas themselves.

Returning now to the epithet *Śākyabhikṣu*, I have found this precise term used only twice in Buddhist literary sources. The first instance, from the MSV, will be discussed straightaway; the second, from a doxographic text, Vasumitra's *Samayabhedoparacakra,* will be discussed by way of a conclusion to this chapter. In fact, the *Śākya* prefix of the MSV's *Śākyabhikṣu* is used in a manner distinctly parallel to the other instances of *Śākya* in the MSV. This occurrence, like so many of the others I have cited, is found in the *Saṅghabhedavastu,* a chapter of the MSV largely concerned with recounting the Buddha's life. The particular story that interests us takes place six years after the Buddha's awakening. At this time, Śuddhodana, the Buddha's father, wants to see his son. So, Śuddhodana sends a messenger to the Buddha, who is staying in Śrāvastī. The Buddha converts this countryman, and that Śākya remains in Śrāvastī with the saṅgha. This happens several times until, finally, Śuddhodana sends a childhood companion of the Buddha named Udāyin. Śuddhodana commits Udāyin to promise that, even if he is converted, he will return to Kapilavastu. Udāyin finds the Buddha, becomes a monk, and keeping his word, returns to Kapilavastu. Before he leaves, however, the Buddha tells

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[92] Cf. Dutt. *Gilgit Manuscripts,* vol. 3.1, 160, 264.

Udāyin how to act upon his return:

> The Blessed One said: "Go Udāyin. But do not enter the royal palace immediately. Standing at the door, you should announce: 'A Śākyabhikṣu has come.' If they tell you to enter, you should enter. If they ask you whether there are any other Śākyabhikṣus, answer that there are. If they ask, 'Is the clothing of Prince Sarvārthasiddha just like this?' you should answer, 'Just so.'[93]

In this context it is once again clear that this epithet is used specifically to refer to a monk who is a member of the Śākya clan; not simply a follower of its favorite son, but a blood member of the lineage. Udāyin is a *Śākya* who is a *bhikṣu*.

Does this mean that all of India's *Śākyabhikṣus* were related to Śākyamuni in the same way as Udāyin? Were the nearly 80% of Ajaṇṭā's intrusive period donors whom we know to have been *Śākyabhikṣus* and *Śākya-upāsakas*, members of the *Śākya* family like Devadatta, Ānanda, Śaivali, Udāyin, and Rāhula, the "chief of the Śākya family?"[94] Does grammar and these parallel examples compell the conclusion that perhaps most of Ajaṇṭā's monastic residents, and many monks throughout India in the 5th century and after, claimed direct blood descent to the same line as the Buddha?

Before rejecting this possibility outright through an appeal to the near universal use of familial metaphors in religious literature, let us consider whether it might indeed be the case that true Śākyas, kin to the Buddha, remained in India. To begin with legend, according to the MSV blood Śākyas did have a significant presence within the Buddhist saṅgha. When the Buddha returned to Kapilavastu at his father's behest, Śuddhodana was disgusted to see that the Buddha's followers were predominantly fire-worshipping *jaṭilas*

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[93] *bhagavān āha: udāyin gaccha; na te sahasaiva rājakulaṃ praveṣṭavyam; dvāre sthithvā vaktavyam, śākyabhikṣur āgata iti; yadi kathayanti praviśeti, praveṣṭavyam; praviṣṭasya yadi kathayanti, santy anye 'pi śākyabhikṣava iti, vaktavyaṃ śantīti; yadi kathayanti sarvārthasiddhasyāpi kumārasya evaṃvidha eva veṣa iti, vaktavyam evaṃvidha eveti;* Gnoli. *Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabhedavastu*, vol. 1, 186.

[94] Edward Byles Cowell (ed). *The Jātaka or Stories of the Buddha's Former Births.* (Delhi: Low Price Publications, 1990): vol. 4, 99.

(a type of ascetic, named for their long, twisted dread-locks), whose bodies had been racked by the penances of their former practices. In this father's opinion, these ex-*jaṭilas* did not appear fit companions for his boy. Accordingly, Śuddhodana convened a meeting of the Śākyas. He observed that had Sarvārthasiddha not become a Buddha, he would have been a Cakravartin, and the Śākyas his followers. Hence, now that Sarvārthasiddha is the Supreme Dharmarāja, should not the Śākyas still be his followers? Accordingly, one son from every Śākya family was enrolled as a Buddhist monk.[95] Not all of these Śākyas were eager to join: of the five hundred Śākyas who became *bhikṣus*, the Buddha's half-brother Nanda and his cousin Devadatta are the best known for their reluctance; a group of four Śākyas named Kokālika, Khaṇḍadravya, Kaṭamorakatiṣya and Samudradatta also joined against their will, and became Devadatta's chief supporters in his schismatic plot.

Further provisions were made for Śākyas to join the saṅgha, in a ruling that could be significant for our investigation. While the Buddha was dwelling in Śrāvastī a *tīrthika* who had entered the Buddhist saṅgha forsook the Buddha for his former religion. As a result of this, Śākyamuni made the following rule: only non-Buddhists who are fire-worshipping *jaṭilas* or Śākyas can be ordained as monks immediately upon application;[96] all other non-Buddhists must have a probationary period of four months. This injunction is

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[95] *rājñā śuddhodanena jaṭilā pravrajitāḥ bhikṣavo dṛṣtāḥ; śānteryāpathatvāc cittaprāsādikā no tu kāyaprāsādikāḥ kaṣṭais tapovrataviśeṣaiḥ karśitaśarīrāḥ; dṛṣṭvā ca punar asyaitad abhavat: kiṃ vāpīme jaṭilāḥ śānteryapathatvāc cittaprāsādikāḥ no tu kāyaprāsādikāḥ; kathaṃrūpeṇa parivāreṇa bhagavān śobheta; saṃlakṣayati, śākyaparivāreṇaiti; tataḥ sarvaśākyān sannipātya kathayati; bhavanto yadi sarvārthasiddhaḥ kumāro na pravrajito 'bhaviṣyat, ko 'bhaviṣyad? rājā cakravartī; yūyaṃ ke 'bhaviṣyata? anuyātrikāḥ; idanīṃ sarvārthasiddhaḥ kumāro 'nuttaro dharmarājaḥ; kasmān nānuyātrikā bhavatha; deva kiṃ pravrajāmaḥ? pravrajata; kiṃ sarva eva? kulaikikayā; evaṃ kurmaḥ; rājñā śuddhodanena kapilavastunagare ghaṇṭāvaghoṣaṇaṃ kāritam; rājā evaṃ samājñpayati mama viṣayanivāsibhiḥ śākyaiḥ kulaikikayā pravrajitavyam iti* Gnoli. *Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabhedavastu*, vol. 1, 200.

[96] *dge slong dag de lta bas na nye du śākya dang me ba ral ba can ma gtogs pa sems mgu bar ma gyur ba'i mu stegs can rab tu dbyung bar mi bya zhing bsnyen par rdzogs par mi bya 'o | gal te nye du śākya mu stegs can gyi rgyal mtshan 'ongs shing gal te legs bar gsungs pa'i chos 'dul ba la rab tu 'byung ba dang bsynen bar rdzogs pa dge slong gi gnos po 'dad na | dge slong dag de rab tu dbyung bar bya zhing bsnyen par dzogs par bya 'o | de ci'i phyir zhe na | dge slong dag nga ni nye du rnams la nye du'i yongs su spongs ba sbyin par byed pa'i phyir ro |* (Derge Ka 72[a]5-6).

not unique to the Mūlasarvāstivāda tradition: the Pāli vinaya records it as well (*Mahāvagga* 1.38).[97] With this rule, the vinaya institutionalizes a privileged place for Śākyas within the Buddhist institution merely because they are the Buddha's blood kin; the *jaṭilas* receive this privilege because their own doctrines include that of karma, right action, causality, and vigor.[98]

The question remains, however, whether the Śākya line continued in India as late as the fifth century C.E. and after. According to tradition (here in the telling of Hsüan-Tsang), shortly before the Buddha's *parinirvāṇa,* the Śākya family was almost completely destroyed by Virūḍhaka, the king of Kośala, whom they had gravely insulted.[99] Hsüan-Tsang claims that 9990 Śākyas were killed by Virūḍhaka. But this pilgrim also recounts that four Śākya men escaped their family's fate. Each set up a Śākya kingdom in India's northwestern mountains: one in Uḍḍiyāna near Gandhāra, one in Bāmyān, one in Himatala, and one in Śāmbhī. Although Virūḍhaka's destruction of the Śākyas is universally accepted within Buddhist traditions, the number of Śākyas who survived and location of their kingdoms varies. According to the MSV, only one Śākya escaped, to Uḍḍiyāna in the northwest.[100] A parallel legend is kept in Sri Lanka's *Mahāvamsa* (verse 8.18f.).[101] In this text, a son of Amṛtodana (the younger brother of Śuddhodana), escapes and establishes a city south of the Ganges; later this Śākya gives his daughter in marriage

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[97] I. B. Horner (trans). *The Book of Discipline (Vinaya-Piṭaka) Volume IV: Mahāvagga.* (London: Pāli Text Society, 1982): 85-9.

[98] *me ba ral pa can dag ni las mra ba dang | me ba ral pa can dag ni bya ba smara ba dang | rgyu smra bad | brtson 'grus msra ba yin pa'i phyir ro* | (Derge 73^{b}4-5).

[99] Hsüan-Tsang. *Si-Yu Ki*, vol. 2, 20-21. Also see André Bareau. "Le Massacre des Śākya: Essai d'interprétation," *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême Orient.* 69 (1981): 45-73.

[100] W. Woodville Rockhill. *The Life of the Buddha and the Early History of his Order Derived from Tibetan Works in the bkah-hgyur and bstan-hgyur.* (New Delhi: Navrang, 1991): 118.

[101] Wilhelm Geiger (trans). *The Mahāvaṃsa or The Great Chronicle of Ceylon.* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1986): 63.

to the ruler of Sri Lanka, whereby this island's rulers claim a familial relation to Kapilavastu's Śākyas. I will return to the *Mahāvamsa's* version below. Lamotte records a tradition that the Mauryas and Aśoka claimed descent from the Śākyas.[102] According to Tibet's *Blue Annals* the first king of Tibet, gNya' khri bstan po, was a descendant of the Śākyas.[103] Kuṣān Buddhists also regarded Śākyamuni and Maitreya "as the most eminent ancestors" in the words of K. Tanabe, although he provides no documentary support for this claim.[104] In sum, as Rockhill asserts "many other Buddhist sovereigns of India and elsewhere claimed the same descent."[105]

Hsüan-Tsang's repeated mention of this legend as he travels through India's northwest suggests that the Śākya founding of local kingdoms was a prominent and accepted legend in this region. It is possible that by Hsüan-Tsang's day, however, a certain conflation had occurred between the Śākyas and the Ś*akas*, a race of nomadic people who invaded this region in second century B.C.E. In fact, the Śakas passed through India's far northwestern borders, penetrated Gandhāra, the Punjab, Gujarat, and were stopped in Ujjain, at the northern limit of the Deccan plateau.[106] As part of their initial invasion, the Śakas must have been particularly brutal in their attack, for Buddhist literature stigmatizes the Śakas as one of a trio of foreign powers predicted to bring about final destruction of Śākyamuni's Dharma. Jan Nattier suggests that this stigma must not be taken as an

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[102] Étienne Lamotte. *History of Indian Buddhism: From the Origins to the Śaka Era.* (Louvain-la-Neuve: Institut Orientaliste, Universite de Louvain, 1988): 681.

[103] George N. Roerich (trans). *The Blue Annals* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988): 36.

[104] Katsumi Tanabe. "Iranian Origin of the Gandharan Buddha and Bodhisattva Images," *Bulletin of the Ancient Orient Museum.* 6 (1984): 21.

[105] Rockhill. *The Life of the Buddha,* 203.

[106] Lamotte. *History of Indian Buddhism,* 443-5.

indication of a continuing persecution of Buddhists by Śakas,[107] for soon after their conquest many Śakas became Buddhists themselves.[108] Indeed, in the first years of the fifth century, Fa-Hien claimed that in the Śakan city of Khotan "the inhabitants all profess our Law."[109] Given the Śakas' bad name within Buddhism, and the fact that Ś*ākya* is a perfectly correct Sanskrit derivative form meaning "Śakan," one could imagine that some Buddhist Śakas would call themselves Śākyas. This could explain, in part, why Hsüan-Tsang found so many Buddhist Śākya kings in areas that were once ruled by the once marauding Śakas. Just as in the phrase ś*ākyaputrīya* ś*ramaṇa*, the noun ś*ramaṇa* is qualified by the adjectival ś*ākyaputrīya*, so in this hypothesis ś*ākya* would adjectivally identify a *bhikṣu* of Śaka origin. Stranger things will have happened in the history of religions than that people known as Ś*aka* would describe themselves using a secondary derivative of their own name that also happens to be the name of the lord to whom they are devoted.

Indeed, to take this hypothesis one step further, the earliest known use of Ś*ākyabhikṣu* is that found at Devnī Morī. At the time of the inscription's creation in the late fourth century, this region was under Śaka control. Devnī Morī's four Ś*ākyabhikṣus* might well have been Śakas as well. Wars displace people: shortly after this inscription's composition, the Gupta king Candragupta II waged a fierce campaign against this region's Śaka rulers,[110] no doubt leaving refugees in his wake. Indeed, the fifth century was a terrible time for Śaka lands. In the middle part of this century, India's northwest saw multiple waves of incursions from Hūṇa tribes. Harold Bailey calls attention to a number

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[107] Jan Nattier. *Once Upon a Future Time: Studies in a Buddhist Prophecy of Decline.* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1991): 155-6.

[108] Lamotte. *History of Indian Buddhism,* 486-92.

[109] Fa-Hien. *A Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms*, 16.

[110] D. R. Bhandarkar, B. C. Chhabra, B. C. and G. S. Gai. *Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings.* Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, volume III (revised). (New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1991): 52-71.

of records regarding the Śakan city of Khotan for this period: one text tells that in approximately 471 C.E. the Zuan-zuan attacked Khotan, which implored China for assistance; similarly, the Tibetan Annals of Khotan, a fifth century text, refer to the incursions of Turks (*dru gu*); Heftalite Hūṇas gained control over the city between 505 and 550.[111] By Hsüan-Tsang's day, this city, which Fa-Hien had found to be vibrant and pious, was still Buddhist but for the most part "nothing but sand and gravel."[112] Several decades before the Hūṇas took control of Khotan, about 454-57 C.E., these nomadic hordes also attacked the Gupta lands but were beaten back by Skandhagupta.[113] In short, I am suggesting the possibility that the sudden explosion of monks calling themselves *Śākyabhikṣus* in central and southern India could be tied to movements of Buddhist monks of Śaka/Śākya origin from the subcontinent's western and the northern borders.

Before I, or the reader, becomes carried away by this chain of speculations, however, I wish to cite the cogent observations of Gérard Fussman. Writing on a group of inscriptions from Gilgit, a region on a major route linking India with Central Asia, Fussman sums up the difficulties of this hypothesis:

> It is difficult to associate the apparent intensification of the contacts between Gilgit and the Indian world in the 5th century of our era with political events, seeing as the ethnic origin of the people who engraved their names on boulders E-F cannot be determined. . . . As one cannot say whether the people who passed through the Alam Bridge in the 5th century had been educated in Mathurā, in Taxila, or in Kashmir, one cannot know the reasons for their leaving their own countries. There is no proof which permits one to associate this graffiti with Hūṇa invasions, for example, and to imagine an exodus of Indian monks in front of the massacres accompanying them.[114]

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[111] Harold Bailey. *The Culture of the Sakas in Ancient Iranian Khotan.* (Delmar, NY: Caravan Publishers, 1982): 4.

[112] Hsüan-Tsang. *Si-yu Ki*, vol. 2, 309.

[113] Bhandarkar, Chhabra, and Gai. *Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings*, 81.

[114] Gérard Fussman. "Inscriptions de Gilgit," *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême Orient.* 65 (1978): 58.

Despite the difficulties of assessing the reasons for the sudden increase in North-South traffic, Fussman indicates that there *was* a dramatic change in the patterns of intercourse between the two regions in Ajaṇṭā's century.

This set of reasonings is particularly interesting for the study of Ajaṇṭā, for it has long been believed that there is a great deal of artistic influence from India's northwest upon the Vākāṭaka period artistry. This topic could well deserve a dissertation of its own, so I will resort to citing the opinions of others for support. Art historian Lawrence Binyon observes that several of Ajaṇṭā's paintings "indicate a certain amount of intercourse with foreign lands."[115] Yazdani, similarly discussing the pronounced number of foreign types in a painting in Cave 1, writes that "there is no doubt that the figures of foreigners represented in the scene bear a very striking resemblance to the people of Turkistan and some other countries to the north-west of India, and as in the frescoes the artists have invariably delineated Buddhist stories, adopting characters from contemporary life, the presence of these foreigners seems to mark a period when the people of the Deccan had acquired familiarity with the inhabitants of the countries north-west of India"[116] (Fig. 57). Yazdani also describes many foreigners in a depiction of the Buddha's descent from Trāyastriṃśa Heaven to Sāṃkāśya.[117] Anand Krishna found on the pillars of Cave 10 "an exceptional group of painted Buddha figures" showing "heavy Gāndhāra influence" (Fig. 58).[118] Odile Divakaran also suggests the possibility of flights from India's North-West in the face of Hūṇa invasions, and enumerates five developments in the Gupta period art of

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[115] Ghulam Yazdani. *Ajanta*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1930-55), vol. 1, xvi.

[116] Yazdani. *Ajanta*, vol. 1, 46.

[117] Yazdani. *Ajanta*, vol. 3, 66-70.

[118] Anand Krishna. "An Exceptional Group of Painted Buddha Figures at Ajaṇṭā," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 4 (1981): 96.

central India and the Deccan that can be tied to Gandhāra.[119] Kurt Behrendt also hypothesizes the Hūṇa invasions as occasion for the influx of northerners to the Deccan. To support this claim, he cites a number of motival elements that are found commonly in the north-west and Central Asia, but nowhere else in the India of this century except Ajaṇṭā, these include full-body halos, pearl rondels, foliage organized into a crescent, and monumental imagery.[120]

Furthermore, the Śākyas themselves are portrayed as north-westerners in Cave 16's rendition of Aśvaghoṣa's *Saundarananda*. Verse 5.1 of Aśvaghoṣa's text describes the Śākya's reaction to Śākyamuni in their midst: "Then the Śākyas, dismounting from their horses chariots and elephants, and clothed according to their wealth, devoutly made obeisance to the Great Sage."[121] My own slide of this scene is unusable. Accordingly, I supply a detail from Schlingloff's *Studies* (Fig. 59), and an extract from Yazdani's description: "Starting from the top right end a Parthian, or Scythian, chief is seen, who is riding on a steel-grey horse. The features of the rider are indistinct, but his conical cap with a fur brim and long full-sleeved coat prove him unmistakably to be an inhabitant of one of the Asiatic countries to the north-west of India."[122] Finally, there is the matter of the relationship between Ajaṇṭā and the Mūlasarvāstivāda *nikāya*. The provenance and composition of the MSV has been a topic of some controversy, most prominently in a

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[119] Odile Divakaran. "Avalokiteśvara -- from the North-West to the Western Caves," *East and West.* 39 (1989): 156-57.

[120] Kurt Behrendt. "Ajaṇṭā's Relationship to Gandhara and Central Asia: An Analysis of the Impact of the Huna's Invasion." (Unpublished paper written in 1991).

[121] Aśvaghoṣa. *The Saundarananda of Aśvaghoṣa.* Ed. by E. H. Johnston. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975): 25.

[122] Yazdani. *Ajanta*, vol. 3, 52.

debate between E. Frauwallner[123] and Lamotte[124] as to whether this text originated in Mathurā or Kaśmīr. Although, as Gnoli observes, neither scholar's hypothesis has a secure basis,[125] he and the majority of scholars whose opinions he reviews concur in Lamotte's position that the MSV originated "from an immense compendium of discipline which . . . was probably compiled in Kaśmīr,"[126] and which "cannot . . . [be] date[d] earlier than the fourth-fifth centuries"[127] in its present form. By the late seventh century, in I-Tsing's account, "in the northern region all belong to the Sarvāstivādanikāya."[128]

To conclude this discussion, we have evidence of at least one person who fits our criteria for a Ś*ākyabhikṣu:* Buddhabhadra. No, unfortunately not the Buddhabhadra responsible for Ajaṇṭā's Cave 26, but Buddhabhadra the translator, born in Kashmir in 369 C.E., died in Kashmir in 448. In between these dates, Buddhabhadra travelled to China, where he translated treatises on meditation. According to the *Kao seng chuan*, a Chinese collection of the biographies of prominent Buddhists, Buddhabhadra was himself a Śākya, whose family originated in Kapilavastu. One will recall that according the Sri Lankan *Mahāvamsa's* version of the Śākyas' massacre, Amṛtodana, the nephew of Śuddhodana and brother of Ānanda and Devadatta, escaped to found a city south of the Ganges. The *Kao seng chuan's* information seems to support this text's version of events: Buddhabhadra's family claims descent from the Śākya king Amṛtodana; but its north-western provenance is said to be due to more recent circumstances, namely that

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[123] Erich Frauwallner. *The Earliest Vinaya and the Beginnings of Buddhist Literature.* (Rome: Instituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1956).

[124] Lamotte. *History of Indian Buddhism*, 176-79.

[125] Gnoli. *Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabhedavastu*, vol. 1, xvii-xxi.

[126] Lamotte. *History of Indian Buddhism*, 178.

[127] Lamotte. *History of Indian Buddhism*, 657.

[128] I-Tsing. *A Record of the Buddhist Religion*, 9.

Buddhabhadra's merchant grandfather, Dharmadeva, moved to that region.[129] Finally, Lamotte calls attention to a second such *Śākyabhikṣu*: Vimokṣaprajña, a kṣatriya from the Śākya-descended ruling family of Uḍḍiyāna, who worked as a missionary in Lo-yang China from 516 to 541.[130]

This attempt to understand *Śākyabhikṣu* as meaning that certain Buddhists claimed genealogical membership within Śākyamuni's own family appears to have more basis than one might think. There is a tradition, still accepted in the seventh century, that Śākyas from Kapilavastu established kingdoms in the Northwest. *Śākya* can be derived grammatically from *Śaka*; this fudging of terms seems possible in light of the fact that Buddhist literature reviles the Śakas as the destroyers of Śākyamuni's religion but many Śakas in fact became Buddhists. Śaka territories in India's southwest and northwest alike were invaded by the Guptas and Hūṇas respectively at precisely the time the *Śākyabhikṣu* epithet came into vogue in central and southern India. One can draw many parallels directly between the Buddhist art of the regions under Hūṇa attack and Ajaṇṭā. Finally, there is the strong possibility that the text which seems to have had the greatest influence upon the architecture and decoration of Ajaṇṭā, the MSV, was compiled in the north-west.

Lest one push this interpretation too hard, however, Fussman's caveat must be remembered: this is a chain of circumstantial evidence providing a possible, though by no means definite, identification of Ajaṇṭā's *Śākyabhikṣus*. Indeed, while this is one possibility, such a literal interpretation is not necessary. Familial metaphors are productive in that they can be applied to a range of relationships that are not physically realized in blood or marriage. This can be as simple as when a preceptor addresses his student

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[129] Paul Demiéville. "La Yogācārabhūmi de Saṅgharakṣa," *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême Orient.* 44 (1954): 377, n. 3.

[130] Lamotte. *History of Indian Buddhism*, 682.

"*putra*," son;[131] or, similarly, when the Buddha's disciple Mahākāśyapa calls himself a son of the Dharmarāja.[132] More explicit yet is the MSV's injunction that a monk newly entered into the saṅgha should address the preceptor as a father, and the preceptor should address the new monk a son.[133] The potentially metaphoric or symbolic nature of this familial lineage is explicated by Sthiramati, a Buddhist paṇḍit of the 6th century, in his sub-commentary to Vasubandhu's commentary on the *Madhyāntavibhāga*. This text's authorship is attributed to Maitreya, the next Buddha, whom Vasubandhu characterizes as *sugatātmaja*.[134] Literally this Sanskrit can be translated, "born of the self of the Sugata;" *ātmaja* is a common word for "son," however, allowing "son of the Sugata" as a reasonable translation. Sthiramati clarifies that, according to a sūtra (he does not say which), Maitreya is the Buddha's *ātmaja* because he belongs to the Buddha's *vaṃśa*, his lineage.[135] Nor is Maitreya the Buddha's only mid-sixth century *ātmaja*. An inscription from Nālanda dated to this period records that King Yasovarmmadeva gave a dwelling to the local monks, called "*Śākyātmaja*" in the inscription.[136] As these were not literally the Buddha's sons, would we say they were blood members of the Śākya lineage?

Yet, even here, to decode this metaphor it is best to refer to the genuine article, the true *Śākyātmaja*. Buddha Śākyamuni did have a son, named Rāhula or Rāhulabhadra. And to foreshadow my conclusions, I will suggest that Rāhula can be viewed as the chief of

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[131] Dutt. *Gilgit Manuscripts,* vol. 3.2, 175.

[132] Dutt. *Gilgit Manuscripts,* vol. 3.1, 174.

[133] *deng phyin chad khyod kyis mkhan po la pha'i 'du shes nye bar gzhag par bya 'o | mkhan pos kyang khyod la by'i 'du zhes nye bar gzhag bya 'o* (Derge Ka 63^{a}5-6).

[134] Vasubandhu. *Seven Works of Vasubandhu, the Buddhist Psychological Doctor.* Ed. and trans. by Stephen Anacker. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984): 424.

[135] *sugatātmanā jāta iti sugatātmajaḥ | yathoktaṃ śūtrāntare jāto bhavati tathāgatavaṃśe tadātmakavastu pratilābhād iti* | In Demiéville "La Yogācārabhūmi de Saṅgharakṣa," 386, n. 9.

[136] Hirananda Sastri. "Nalanda Stone Inscription of the Reign of Yasovarmmadeva," *Epigraphia Indica 1929-30.* 20 (1933): 44, line 15.

Śākyabhikṣus, for not only was Rāhula the Buddha's son, but he symbolized or embodied the lineage of Buddhahood as a family affair. To explore these contentions, let us return to Ajaṇṭā again. In my chapter on the sources for studying Ajaṇṭā, one of the arguments I used to establish the MSV as having an eminent role at the site was the following passage from the *Vinayakṣudrakavastu,* where the Buddha tells Anāthapiṇḍada how to decorate a monastery:

> On the outer door, you should represent a yakṣa holding a staff; in the vestibule, the Great Miracle [at Śrāvastī] and the Wheel [of Existence] in five divisions; in the pavilion, a cycle of jātaka stories; at the entrance to the Gandhakuṭī, yakṣas holding garlands; in the assembly hall, the most venerable monk [=Buddha] descending to teach the Dharma; in the kitchen, yakṣas holding food; on the treasury door, a yakṣa with an iron hook; at the well, nāgas adorned with ornaments, holding water vessels; in the bathhouse and steam-room, sufferings from the *Deva-sūtra* or the different hells; in the infirmary, the Tathāgata giving treatment; in the toilet, a horrible cemetery; on cell doors, draw a skeleton and skull.

And as one will recall, Cave 17 corresponds quite closely to these prescriptions. Of the twelve elements described, the evidence at hand allows us to investigate only five. Ajaṇṭā's Cave 17 is the sole Indian Buddhist monastery retaining each of these five: a Great Miracle on the antechamber's right wall, a Wheel of Existence on the veranda's left wall, *jātaka* stories on all the walls, *yakṣas* holding garlands at the central shrine's entrance, and the Buddha teaching after descending from heaven on the antechamber's left wall.

This close correspondence between the MSV's stipulations and Cave 17 is significant, for within this cave there is yet another iconographic group. This group is not described in the MSV, but apparently had great import for this cave's Mūlasarvāstivādins. These images were painted upon what may well be the second most sacrally significant place in Cave 17 after the central shrine itself: namely, the rear walls of the antechamber, flanking the entrance to the Buddha shrine (Fig. 60[137]). Similarly at Cave 19, which we

[137] I have reproduced only the left wall. See Suresh Vasant ("Dīpaṅkara Buddha at Ajanta." In *The Age of the Vākāṭakas*. Ed. by A. M. Shastri. [New Delhi: Harman Publishing, 1992]: 215 & plate 54) for a discussion and photograph of the right.

consider the donation of the same patron, these two images flank the entrance to this stūpa hall (Figs. 61, 62, 63, 64). These paired scenes can be found elsewhere at Ajaṇṭā as well: in a window-box of Cave 17,[138] and the clerestory of Cave 26 (Figs. 65, 66, 67).

The first of these paired scenes recounts a past life of Buddha Śākyamuni, in which, as the youthful brāhmaṇa Sumati, he worshiped Dīpaṅkara Buddha and vowed that he himself would become a Buddha in the future for the benefit of all living beings. The second occurs during the Buddha's return to Kapilavastu, where he met his son Rāhula for the first time, and inducted Rāhula into the saṅgha. These two tales have several redactions in various textual traditions, the intricacies of which I have no inclination to explicate. There are two points I wish to make in regard to these images, the first minor, the second crucial. First, they provide supplementary evidence for a connection between India's northwest and Ajaṇṭā. In addition to the northwest, the pairing of these images is attested in only two places: Ajaṇṭā and China of the year 424 CE.[139] Surely, China received this iconography from Central Asian Buddhists; it is conceivable Ajaṇṭā did so as well.

More important than this supporting evidence of a northwestern Śaka/Śākya-Ajaṇṭā connection, however, is the Dharma, encoded in these paired images. As has been noted by Suresh Vasant and Maurizio Taddei,[140] these two images "are so often grouped together because they reflect a dynastic ideology -- the [Dīpaṅkara] *jātaka* can be read as a 'Story of Lineage,' and the same could be said of the meeting of Siddhārtha and his son Rāhula."[141]

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[138] See Vasant ("Dīpaṅkara Buddha at Ajanta," 214-15 & plates 52-3) for his reproductions.

[139] Alexander Coburn Soper. *Literary Evidence for Early Buddhist Art in China*. (Ascona: Artibus Asiae Publishers, 1959): 43.

[140] Maurizio Taddei. "Appunti sull'iconografia di alcune manifestazioni luminose dei Buddha," in *Gururājamañjarikā. Studi in onore di Giuseppe Tucci*. volume 2. (Napoli: Instituto Universitario Orientale, 1974); Maurizio Taddei. "The *Dīpaṃkara-jātaka* and Siddhārtha's Meeting with Rāhula: How Are They Linked to the Flaming Buddha?," *Annali di Instituto Universitario Orientali*. 52 (1992): 103-107.

[141] Taddei. "*Dīpaṃkara-jātaka* and Siddhārtha's Meeting with Rāhula," 105.

Both scenes depict the issue of transmission of a lineage. For the encounter with Dīpaṅkara this point is clear: young Sumati is inspired by Buddha Dīpaṅkara, vowing to become a Buddha through the act of placing his hair under that Buddha's feet. Dīpaṅkara predicts that Sumati's aim will indeed be realized: he will be born as a Buddha, the "Śākyātmaja Śākyamuni."[142] Just as Sthiramati explained Maitreya to be the Sugata's *ātmaja* because of his membership in the *Tathāgatavaṃśa*, the lineage of Tathāgatas, so in this encounter with Dīpaṅkara Sumati becomes Dīpaṅkara's spiritual son and joins the family of Buddhas. As we see, for the *Divyāvadāna's* authors a crucial sign of his identity within this lineage is that he will be a *Śākya*.

The tale of Sumati's encounter with Dīpaṅkara is well-known, its symbolism clear. The tale of Rāhula meeting his father is both more obscure and ambiguous, as is Rāhula himself, who is seldom met in Buddhist literature despite his unique status as Śākyamuni's biological son. According to the Mūlasarvāstivāda tradition, Rāhula was conceived on the day of the bodhisattva's renunciation[143] and born at the moment of the Buddha's Awakening, following a six year period of gestation.[144] During those six years Yaśodhara performed ascetic penances like her husband.[145] Not only did poor Yaśodhara have the distress of a six year pregnancy, but young Rāhula had the pain of never knowing his father. They met as follows: One day during Śākyamuni's return to Kapilavastu, six years after his awakening, Yaśodhara saw the Buddha begging for food at the palace, and resolved to win him back. So Yaśodhara went to another renunciate living in Kapilavastu

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[142] Cowell and Neil. *Divyāvadāna*, 252.

[143] *yam eva divasaṃ bodhisattvo nirgatas tam eva divasaṃ yaśodharā āpannasattvā saṃvṛttā* Gnoli. *Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabhedavastu*, vol. 2, 30.

[144] *anuttarajñānādhigame ca bhagavataḥ yaśodharāyāḥ putro jātaḥ* Gnoli. *Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabhedavastu*, vol. 1, 119.

[145] *yadā bodhisattvo duṣkarāṇi carati tadāntaḥpuraṃ api duṣkaraṃ caritum ārabdham;* Gnoli. *Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabhedavastu*, vol. 2, 30.

who was clever with magic. She paid this ascetic five hundred *kārṣāpaṇas* for a sweet that could entice the Buddha to her arms. Yaśodhara then gave the candy to Rāhula, bidding him to offer it to his father. The Buddha knows all. When Rāhula came to him, Śākyamuni miraculously created an array of five hundred identical Buddhas. As the Buddha's son, Rāhula was able to identify the real Śākyamuni. Rāhula gave the candy to his father; the Buddha returned it to Rāhula, who ate and fell under the magic spell. The story ends with the six year old Rāhula leaving his mother and becoming the first Buddhist novice under the tutelage of Śāriputra.[146]

There is a two-fold significance to this encounter. The first, of course, is the familial element, the bringing together of a father and his son. The blood link between Rāhula and Śākyamuni is highlighted within the story by Rāhula's ability to identify his father from a field of five-hundred duplicates. Second, this tale defines the relationship between this unique father and his only son through Śākyamuni's giving Rāhula to Śāriputra for ordination. With this inheritance, Rāhula became the first *śrāmaṇera*, i.e., a novice who has renounced the household but is not full ordained. Indeed, according to Hsüan-Tsang[147] and Fa-Hien,[148] Rāhula was the special object of *śrāmaṇeras'* worship in Mathurā. Rāhula's association with studentship may also be seen in his traditional identification as the *śikṣākāmānām agraḥ*, the foremost of those who desire to train.

More crucially, the Mūlasarvāstivāda tradition very explicitly intertwines these genealogical and spiritual relationships between Buddha and Rāhula. Rāhula's conception at the moment of the bodhisattva's renunciation, his gestation over a six year period during which Yaśodhara performs penances equivalent to her husband's, and Rāhula's birth at the

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[146] Gnoli. *Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabhedavastu*, vol. 2, 31-2.

[147] Hsüan-Tsang. *Si-Yu Ki*, vol. 1, 181.

[148] Fa-Hien. *A Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms*, 45-6.

moment of the Buddha's Awakening make Rāhula a near duplicate of his father. Indeed, in the *Saṅghabhedavastu's* narrative, immediately after the Buddha's Awakening, the narrator switches scenes to Kapilavastu, where Rāhula's birth is announced.[149] Rāhula gestated for a span parallel to that required for Gotama to go from layman to Buddha. Rāhula's life from gestation to birth is structurally equivalent, albeit on an abbreviated temporal scheme, to the Buddha's process of Awakening, which began at his birth as Dīpaṅkara Buddha's spiritual son, and ended with his realization of Buddhahood, the same moment that Rāhula was born to perpetuate these two lineages.

A further indication of Rāhula's significance as the heir to both the Śākya and Buddhist lineages is an interesting passage found at the end of the MSV's enumeration of the Śākya genealogy. The *Saṅghabhedavastu* begins with Mahāmaudgalyāyana narrating a procession of kings from the Mahāsaṃmata at the beginning of terrestrial time, to the founding of the Śākya family, to Śuddhodana, the Buddha, and finally son Rāhula. Mahāmaudgalyāyana's narration ends thus:

> *bhagavato rāhulaḥ putra iti gautamā rāhule mahāsaṃmatavaṃśaḥ pratiṣṭhitaḥ; ucchinnā bhavanetrī vikṣīṇo jātisaṃsāro nāstīdanīṃ punarbhavaḥ*[150]
>
> Rāhula is the son of the Blessed One, O Gautamas. The lineage of the Mahāsaṃmata endures in Rāhula. The will to existence is cut, the round of births is broken: now there is no more rebirth.

This final mention of Rāhula's spiritual attainments is out of place in this otherwise straightforward listing of kings and princes. It appears, however, that the MSV's characterization of Rāhula draws from a broader tradition of statements about all Buddhas'

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[149] Gnoli. *Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabhedavastu*, vol. 1, 119-20.

[150] Gnoli. *Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabhedavastu*, vol. 1, 32.

offspring, and has significant parallels in the Sarvāstivādin *Mahāvadāna Sūtra*[151] and Buddhaghosa's *Sumaṅgalavilāsinī*.[152] For our purposes, the MSV's phrase, "the lineage of the Mahāsaṃmata endures in Rāhula," is most salient. The *Mahāvadāna Sūtra's* parallel passage is especially interesting and significant in its rendition of this line. A Chinese translation of the *Mahāvadāna sūtra* seems to have reproduced almost precisely the text found in the MSV, for Waldschmidt's translation of the Chinese reads that Rāhula as well as other sons of Buddhas "das Geschlect der Buddhas fortsetzten."[153] The extant Sanskrit text of the *Mahāvadāna Sūtra* is rather more ambiguous:

> *ete putrā mahātmānaḥ śarīrāntimadhāriṇaḥ* |
> *sa(rve)ṣām (ā)sravāḥ kṣīṇā nāsti teṣāṃ punarbhavaḥ* ||
>
> These sons [of the Buddhas] are saints.
> *
> They are the final preservers of the[ir] fathers' bodies
> or
> They are heirs who succeed the[ir] fathers' bodies
> *
> All their afflictions are destroyed.
> For them there will be no rebirth.

The second line of my translation represents the *Mahāvadāna Sūtra's* equivalent of the MSV's "the lineage of the Mahāsaṃmata endures in Rāhula." Whereas the MSV's Sanskrit is clear, the *Mahāvadāna's* compound *śarīrāntimadhārin* is ambiguous, allowing for at least two translations. It may be interpreted as saying that Rāhula is the ultimate preserver of Śākyamuni's physical remains, or that Rāhula is an heir who succeeded his father's body within the lineage of Śākyas. These two interpretations play off two syntactic functions of the word *antima* -- which can be the adjectival "last" or the verbal "following after" -- and

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[151] E. Waldschmidt. *Das Mahāvadānasūtra*. Abhandlungen der Deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin. Klasse für Sprachen, Literatur un Kunst. Jahrgang 1952 Nr. 8 / Jahrgang 1954 Nr. 3. (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1953-56).

[152] Cited in Waldschmidt. *Das Mahāvadānasūtra,* 79, n. 2.

[153] Waldschmidt. *Das Mahāvadānasūtra*, 79, n. 1.

two meanings of the word ś*arīra* -- which can be translated as "relic" or as "body." The first interpretation gives the sense of Rāhula as Buddha's spiritual heir in living form, a living caitya, the physical flesh of the Buddha's spiritual flesh; in the second interpretation of this compound, Rāhula is the Buddha's successor in a familial lineage.

This first interpretation gains particular significance in light of a tradition which held that Rāhula was one of group of special arhats charged by Śākyamuni to wander the earth as protectors of his Dharma until Maitreya's coming.[154] Hsüan-Tsang attests to the currency of this legend in Rājagṛha as late as the seventh century, where Rāhula, after receiving a meal from a pious Brāhmaṇa, revealed himself: "Have you never heard of Rāhula, Buddha's own son? I am he! Because I desire to protect the true law I have not yet entered *Nirvāṇa*." The Brāhmaṇa responded by making a shrine for Rāhula, and reverenced his image as if Rāhula were present.[155] If Rāhula was the final embodiment of the Buddha's body, a living reliquary, the ability to meet him after Śākyamuni's *parinirvāṇa* would be significant indeed.

In the second interpretation of this compound, Rāhula is the Buddha's successor in a familial lineage, socially as well as spiritually. This, of course, comes closer to the redaction of the *Saṅghabhedavastu* and the *Mahāvadāna's* Chinese translation cited above. In short, this compound's ambiguity encapsulates the ambiguous role that Rāhula perhaps played within the (Mūla)Sarvāstivāda tradition. The circumstances surrounding Rāhula's birth forced him to undergo *in utero* a spiritualizing process parallel to that adopted by his father. Thus was Rāhula fit to be the ś*arīrāntimadhārin*: to be the ś*arīrāntimadhārin:* to be the Buddha's biological son, maintaining the Śākyan lineage of the Mahāsaṃmata; and to be the Buddha's spiritual son, the embodiment of the

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[154] Sylvain Lévi and Édouard Chavannes. "Les Seize Arhat Protecteurs de la Loi," *Journal Asiatique.* série xi, 8 (1916): 5-50 & 189-304.

[155] Hsüan-Tsang. *Si-Yu Ki*, vol. 2, 42-3.

Tathāgatavaṃśa during the long interval between Śākyamuni and Maitreya Buddhas. After Śākyamuni, Rāhula is the preeminent *Śākyātmaja* and *Śākyabhikṣu.*

To descend yet deeper into speculation, I would call attention to the two plates I have included showing the encounter between Sumati and Dīpaṅkara (Figs. 62, 66). One will notice that in both plates four figures are shown: Sumati, Dīpaṅkara Buddha, a young girl who provides Sumati with flowers in exchange for becoming his wife in every subsequent life,[156] and fourth, a flying dwarf that seems to be making an *añjalī* to Dīpaṅkara (see Fig. 63 for a detail of this figure from Fig. 62). Although no literary tradition records a Rāhula-to-be as having been present at Sumati's prediction to Buddhahood, I would speculate that this dwarf could be a representation of Rāhula in embryo. Thus we would have the entire "holy family" present at its foremost figure's entrance into the *Tathāgatavaṃśa* as a *Śākyātmaja.*

To conclude this discussion of Rāhula, we would want to ask whether there is any special association between him and the Sarvāstivādins or Mūlasarvāstivādins. In fact, this has been proposed. A. F. Hoernle writes, "Tradition asserts that the Buddhist school of the Mūlasarvāstivādins . . . traced their origin back to Rāhula, the son of the Master.[157] A. Banerjee refers to this same 'tradition,'[158] and proposes that this may be why Rāhula's image is to be found on the first page of the Tibetan Vinaya that both he and Csoma Cörösi[159] used. More likely, Hoernle's tradition derives from Bu ston, who writes that the Mūlasarvāstivādin's "teacher was Rāhulabhadra of the Kṣatriya caste, renowned for his

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[156] Cowell and Neil. *Divyāvadāna*, 152.

[157] A. F. Hoernle. *Manuscript Remains of Buddhist Literature found in Eastern Turkestan.* (St. Leonards: Ad Orientem, 1970): 166.

[158] Anukul Chandra Banerjee. *Sarvāstivāda Literature.* (Calcutta: D. Banerjee, 1957): 80.

[159] Alexander Csoma Cörösi. "Analysis of the Dulva, A Portion of the Tibetan Work Entitled the KAH-GYUR," *Asiatic Researches.* 22 (1836): 44.

devotion to the disciplines."[160] This tradition can be traced still further, as early as the Mūlasarvāstivādin monk Śākyaprabha's *Prabhāvatī,* an eighth century commentary on a vinaya text for *śrāmaṇeras.*[161] At least as early as the eighth century we find that Mūlasarvāstivādin monks believed that a *kṣatriya*, like the Buddha's son, devoted to the disciplines, like the Buddha's son, named Rāhulabhadra, like the Buddha's son, was intimately connected with the Mūlasarvāstivādin school.[162] Can we assert that this belief was held by Ajaṇṭā's Mūlasarvāstivādins as well? Of course not. But, by bringing together Ajaṇṭā's inscriptions, images, and relevant textual passages we find sufficient evidence to assert that proposition's possibility and to explore what it might have meant had it been current at Ajaṇṭā in the 5th century. Lévi and Chavannes observed there is no need to deeply question Rāhula's place among the special arhats, for he was especially qualified to inherit and continue the paternal oeuvre.[163] Were this work to be the Dharma of Ajaṇṭā's *Śākyabhikṣus*, we will have now finished the first step to its recovery. Now to begin the second.

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[160] Bu ston. *The History of Buddhism in India and Tibet by Bu ston*. Trans. by E. E. Obermiller. (Delhi: Sri Satguru, 1986): 100.

[161] Lamotte. *History of Indian Buddhism*, 546.

[162] One should be aware that Śākyamuni's son is not the only Rāhulabhadra in Indian Buddhist history. Though the Buddha's Rāhula is the only to fit Bu ston's identification, Bu ston mentions a second Rāhulabhadra, the abbot of Nālanda and the preceptor of Nāgārjuna (*The History of Buddhism in India*, 123). Tāranātha claims that this second Rāhula, Nāgārjuna's teacher was a Brāhmaṇa, a founder of the Mahāyāna, and intimately associated with Nālanda (Tāranātha. *Tāranātha's History of Buddhism in India*. Ed. and trans. by Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya. [Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1990]: 102-5, 110, 131). Whatever the merit of this association between Nāgārjuna and Rāhulabhadra II, the *Prajñāpāramitāstotra* found at the introduction of many *Prajñāpāramitā* sūtras is traditionally attributed to this Rāhulabhadra and is found in full in the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra* attributed to Nāgārjuna (Étienne Lamotte. *Le Traité de la Grande Vertu de Sagesse de Nāgārjuna [Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra].* [Louvain: Peeters, 1981]: vol. 2, 1060, n. 2). Again, Hsüan-Tsang hints at a legendary connection between a Rāhula and Nālanda (*Si-Yu Ki*, vol. 2, 167). Tāranātha names a third Rāhulabhadra as well: a śūdra by birth, native to the South, and Āryadeva's pupil, though Āryadeva is identified as Nāgārjuna's student (Tāranātha. *Tāranātha's History*, 126, 136). Still a fourth Rāhulabhadra is known from Tāranātha's *History* (280); he lived at the time of the Pāla kings, was of kṣatriya birth, and was not very intelligent.

[163] Lévi and Chavannes. "Les Seize Arhat Protecteurs de la Loi," 197.

Between Two *Yânas*

I have presented a series of speculations through which to reconstruct the Dharma of Ajaṇṭā's *Śākyabhikṣus*. This has ranged from consideration that Śaka invaders came to call themselves Śākyas, to the ambiguous personage of Rāhula, his symbolism a potential encapsulization of the *Śākyabhikṣus* own self-understanding. The one point I have not explored is how a Mūlasarvāstivāda monk could be like Rāhula, and claim membership in the Śākya family or the lineage of the Tathāgatas were he not a Śākya or Śaka. If Ajaṇṭā's monks were not the Buddha's blood relations, how could they spiritual kinship with the Buddha, metaphorically aligning themselves with him in terms of a familial genealogy?

Let us begin with a story. At the time Anāthapiṇḍada began to erect a monastery for the Buddha, *tīrthikas* already living in Śrāvastī became concerned over the potential competition for scarce resources, and objected to the king. To prove the preeminence of the Buddha and his disciples, Śāriputra challenged these *tīrthikas* to a contest of magic powers. Naturally Śāriputra's tricks were far superior to those of his opponents. Having defeated the *tīrthikas,* and after making the audience members' minds supple and receptive, Śāriputra then preached the Buddha's Dharma. "And after the audience heard Śāriputra's discourse, many thousands of people realized great attainments: some conceived an aspiration for the awakening of a Śrāvaka; some for the awakening of a Pratyekabuddha; some for Unexcelled, Complete and Perfect Awakening; some grasped the going for refuge and the principles of training; some realized the fruit of a Stream Enterer; some the fruit of a Once Returner; some the fruit of a Never Returner; some undertook renunciation and realized the Arhatship through the elimination of all afflictions."[164]

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[164] *dharmadeśanā kṛṭā yāṃ śrutvā anekaiḥ satvasahasraiḥ mahān viśeṣa āgataḥ; kaiścic chrāvakabodhau cittāny utpāditāni; kaiścit pratyekāyāṃ bodhau; kaiścid anuttarāyāṃ samyaksaṃbodhau; kaiścic charaṇagamanaśikśapadāni gṛhītāni; kaiścit srotaāpattiphalaṃ sākṣātkṛtaṃ; kaiścid sakṛdāgāmiphalam; kaiścid anāgāmiphalam; kaiścit pravrajya sarva-*

This list of the audience's spiritual attainments can be divided into two parts. First it enumerates three species of realization, and second, the steps along a Buddhist spiritual path from taking refuge to Arhatship. For reconstructing the Dharma of Ajaṇṭā's *Śākya-bhikṣus,* our concern is with the distinction between the awakenings of a Śrāvaka, a Pratyekabuddha, and a Buddha. This tripartite division of spiritual aspirations is found elsewhere in the MSV as well. For instance, during Devadatta's schism, the text claims that no one in the saṅgha planted a seed in the Śrāvaka-bodhi, no one planted a seed in the Pratyekabuddha-bodhi, and none in the Buddha-bodhi either.[165] And this distinction of *bodhis* is not unique to this Mūlasarvāstivādins. Within the Theravāda tradition, the Buddha and lesser arhats are distinguished in the *Saṃyuttanikāya* (22.58)[166] and the abhidharma text *Puggalapaññatti*[167] explicates the difference between all three. As I will soon indicate, the Mahāyāna too was quite interested in these distinctions.

Moving on from the MSV, Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośa* takes us a step closer to understanding this distinction with its explanation for why the individuals in Śāriputra's audience would have had such different aspirations after hearing the same Dharma discourse. Vasubandhu writes, the "three [types of] *bodhi* arise due to the distinctions between people: the Śrāvakabodhi, Pratyekabodhi, and Unexcelled, Complete and Perfect Bodhi" (verse 6.67).[168] Still more informative than the *Kośa* on this point is the *Abhi-*

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kleśaprahāṇād arhatvaṃ sākṣātkṛtam; Gnoli. *Gilgit Manuscript of the Śayanāsanavastu*, 22.

[165] Gnoli. *Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabhedavastu*, vol. 2, 205.

[166] F. L. Woodward (trans). *The Book of Kindred Sayings (Samyutta-Nikāya).* (London: Pāli Text Society, 1925): part III, 57-8.

[167] Bimala Charan Law (trans). *Designation of Human Types (Puggala-Paññati).* (London: Pāli Text Society, 1924): 97.

[168] Vasubandhu. *Abhidharmakośa and Bhāṣya of Ācārya Vasubandhu with Sphūṭārthā Commentary of Ācārya Yaśomitra.* Ed. by Dwarika Das Shastri. (Varanasi: Bauddha Bharati, 1987): 1016.

dharmadīpa, a text dating to almost the same period as Ajaṇṭā.[169] Like the *Kośa*, the *Dīpa* asserts that the three *bodhis* are distinguished because there are three types of people. It elaborates:

> [As for] Buddhabodhi, Pratyekabuddhabodhi, and Śrāvakabodhi, these are the three divisions of supreme nirvāṇa. This is so because these three *bodhis* are predominantly the fruits of human effort. [As for] easy, middling, and difficult: the Mahāyāna divides the 37 wings of *bodhi* according to the divisions, easy, intermediate, and difficult. The categories easy, intermediate, and difficult are said [to correspond to] the *yānas* of the Buddha, Pratyekabuddha, and Śrāvaka.[170]

First let me note, this passage contains the only mention of the Mahāyāna I have ever seen in an Indian non-Mahāyānist text. More important for the present argument, however, is the *Dīpa's* linking of the three *bodhis* with three different types of people as well as with the three *yānas*. Following the *Abhidharmadīpa's* interpretive scheme, we may say that those *tīrthikas* in Śāriputra's audience who conceived an aspiration for Śrāvakabodhi can be classified as travelling on the Śrāvakayāna; their spiritual species being distinct from that of the Pratyekabuddhayānists who conceived an aspiration of Pratyekabodhi; both also differ distinctly from the *tīrthikas* who conceived a desire for Unexcelled, Complete and Perfect Buddhahood, and thereby entered onto the Buddhayāna.

The *Abhidharmadīpa* suggests that this interpretive scheme whereby Buddhist practitioners are into shunted onto three *yānas* is a distinctly Mahāyānist doctrine. And, to be sure, such terminology is often found in the Mahāyānist literary corpus. For just a few examples: Within the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa sūtra*, a goddess dwelling at Vimalakīrti's house confuses Śāriputra by claiming to simultaneously belong to the Śrāvakayāna, a

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[169] Padmanabh S. Jaini (ed). *Abhidharmadīpa with Vibhāṣāprabhāvṛtti.* (Patna: Kashi Prasad Jayaswal Research Institute, 1977): 134.

[170] *buddhapratyekabuddhaśrāvakabodhayaḥ | uttamanirvāṇāṅgabhūtā tad dhi tisṛṇām api bodhīnāṃ puruṣakāraphalaṃ tatprādhānyatvāt | mṛdumadhyādhimātrāḥ saptatriṃśadbodhipakṣyā dharmāḥ mṛdumadhyādhimātrabhedabhinnā mahāyāṇam | mṛdumadhyādhimātrabhedabhinnaṃ buddhapratyekabuddhaśrāvakayāṇam iti ucyate |* Jaini. *Abhidharmadīpa,* 358.

Pratyekabuddhayāna, and Mahāyāna all.[171] This passage gets its punch, of course, from the expectation that, like the members of Śāriputra's audience in Śrāvastī, any individual will have conceived an aspiration for only a single form of *bodhi*. Here, also, we see that the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* equates the *Abhidharmadīpa's* 'Buddhayāna' with the Mahāyāna itself. The *Aṣṭasahasrikāprājñāparamitā sūtra* claims that a being should be considered a bodhisattva mahāsattva if his thoughts and realizations are not shared in common with the Śrāvakas and Pratyekabuddhas;[172] a bodhisattva is someone established in and mounted on the Great Vehicle.[173] As a final example, let us look at what has become the locus classicus for this doctrine within modern discussions of the three *yānas,* from the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka sūtra*:

> There are some beings who, following and desiring another's words, enter into the Tathāgata's religion in order to realize the Four Noble Truths so as to attain parinirvāṇa for themselves. These are said to adhere to the *Śrāvaka-yāna*. . . . There are other beings who, desiring knowledge without a teacher, restraint, and concentration, enter into the Tathāgata's religion in order to realize the causes and conditions so as to attain parinirvāṇa for themselves. These are said to adhere to the *Pratyekabuddha-yāna*. . . . There are still other beings who, desiring omniscience, the knowledge of a Buddha, the self-originated knowledge, knowledge without a teacher, enter into the Tathāgata's religion in order to realize the knowledges, powers, and confidences of a Tathāgata so as to attain parinirvāṇa for all beings, for the benefit of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the benefit and happiness of the great body of people, of gods and of humans. These are said to adhere to the *Mahāyāna*.[174]

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[171] Étienne Lamotte (trans). *The Teaching of Vimalakīrti (Vimalakīrtinirdeśa).* Trans. by Sara Boin. (London: Pāli Text Society, 1976): 163-4.

[172] *bodhisattvo mahāsattva iti bhagavann ucyate | yad api tad bhagavan bodhicittaṃ sarvajñatācittam anāsravaṃ cittam asamaṃ cittaṃ asamasaṃ cittam asādhāraṇaṃ sarvaśrāvakapratyekabuddhaiḥ* P. L. Vaidya (ed). *Aṣṭasāhāsrikā Prajñāpāramitā.* (Darbhanga: Mithila Insitute of Post-Graduate Studies and Research in Sanskrit Learning, 1960): 10.

[173] *evaṃ bhagavan bodhisattvo mahāsattvo . . . mahāyānasaṃpratisthito mahāyānasamārūḍho bhavati |* Vaidya. *Aṣṭasāhāsrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, 11-12.

[174] *tatra kecit sattvā paraghoṣaśravānugamanamākāṅkṣamāṇā ātmaparinirvāṇahetoś caturāryasatyānubodhāya tathāgataśāsane 'bhiyujyante | te ucyante śrāvakayānaṃ kāṅkṣamāṇāḥ . . . anye sattvā anācāryakaṃ jñānaṃ damaśamatham ākāṅkṣamāṇā ātmaparinirvāṇahetor hetupratyayānubodhāya tathāgataśāsane 'bhiyujyante | te ucyante pratyekabuddhayānam*

I trust the trajectory of my argument is becoming clear: insofar as Ś*ākyabhikṣu* encodes a canonical identification of its bearer with the familial and spiritual lineages of Śākyamuni Buddha, use of this epithet is a declaration that one differs from other Buddhists, mere *bhikṣus*, in that one has conceived an aspiration for Unexcelled, Complete and Perfect Awakening. In brief, I am claiming that Ś*ākyabhikṣu* is a highly resonant and complex synonym for *bodhisattva*. Like Rāhula, India's Ś*ākyabhikṣus* were *Sugatātmaja,* the true sons of the Sugata.

According to a terminology used widely in Mahāyāna literature, the epithet Ś*ākya-bhikṣu* could be viewed as an affirmation that one belongs to the *gotra* of a bodhisattva. This term, *gotra*, came into Buddhism from a Brāhmaṇical usage, where it means 'clan.' More specifically according to popular Indian usage, there were eight *gotras,* each of which claimed descent from one of seven seers named in the *Ṛg Veda* or Agastya, that text's author.[175] And according to the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa,* the male members of these eight *gotras* were often went by the name of their *gotra's* sage-father;[176] the Śākyas were the descendants of *ṛṣi* Gotama, for instance, and accordingly one often sees the Buddha called 'Gotama.' However, Baudhāyana, a systematizer of the *gotras*, asserted that in fact "there were . . . thousands, nay millions of 'gotras' . . . all neatly [arranged] under their appropriate patriarchs.[177] I would not want to say that Śākyamuni came to be considered

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ākāṅkṣamāṇās . . . apare punaḥ sattvāḥ sarvajñajñānaṃ buddhajñānaṃ svayaṃbhujñānam anācāryakaṃ jñānam ākāṅkṣamāṇā bahujanahitāya bahujanasukhāya lokānukampāyai mahato janakāyasyārthāya hitāya sukhāya devānāṃ ca manuṣyāṇāṃ ca sarvasattvaparinirvāṇahetos tathāgatajñānabalavaiśāradyānubodhāya tathāgataśāsane 'bhiyujyate | te ucyante mahāyānam ākāṅkṣamāṇās P. L. Vaidya (ed). *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtram*. (Darbhanga: Mithila Insitute of Post-Graduate Studies and Research in Sanskrit Learning, 1960): 55.

[175] John Brough. *The Early Brahmanical System of Gotra and Pravara*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953): 4.

[176] Govind S. Ghurye. *Two Brahmanical Institutions; Gotra and Charana*. (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1972): 86.

[177] Ghurye. *Two Brahmanical Institutions,* 84.

the patriarch of one of these millions of alternate Brāhmaṇic *gotras,* but the Ś*ākyabhikṣus* taking the name of Śākyamuni suggests resonances with and an appropriation of this broad cultural practice. In fact, such resonances may explain how an epithet significant for an internal division within the Buddhist saṅgha could function in extra-Buddhist discourse generically for 'Buddhist,' as we found above in my discussion of Sircar et. al.

Functionally, these Brāhmaṇic *gotras'* were a means for designating exogamous clans. And whereas this social function was not taken wholesale into Buddhism, the term *gotra* most definitely did penetrate Buddhist thought. In this religion's literature, however, it is most often used in the sense of the spiritual predisposition or capability of an individual. According to the *Bodhisattvabhūmi,* a person of the Śrāvaka *gotra* should be nurtured to fruition in the Śrāvakayāna; one of the Pratyekabuddha *gotra* should be nurtured to fruition in the Pratyekabuddhayāna; one of the Buddha *gotra* should be nurtured to fruition in the Mahāyāna; but a person who has no *gotra* should be nurtured to fruition in the thought of a good rebirth.[178] Similarly, the *Mahāyānsūtrālaṃkārabhāṣya* posits an individual's predisposition towards one of the *yānas* as a function of his individual *gotra:* "there is a differentiation of *gotras* in the three *yānas* . . . because the fruit corresponds to the seed" (verse 3.2).[179] Within this latter text *kula*, rather than *gotra*, is used for 'family,' as when it claims that birth in the Tathāgata's *kula* (*tathāgatakule janma*) is the eleventh of a bodhisattva's thirteen practices for benefiting beings, who are fixed severally within a lesser, intermediate, or superior *gotra* (verse 5.5).[180] This latter equation

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[178] *tatra paripācyāḥ pudgalāḥ samāsata*ś *catvāraḥ* | ś*rāvakagotraḥ* ś*rāvakayāne* | *pratyekabuddhagotraḥ pratyekayāne* | *buddhagotro mahāyāne paripācayitavyaḥ* | *agotrastho 'pi pudgalaḥ sugatimanāya paripācayitavyo bhavati* | Asaṅga. *Bodhisattvabhūmi*. Ed. by Nalinaksha Dutt. (Patna: Kashi Prasad Jayaswal Research Institute, 1978): 55.

[179] *asti yānatraye gotrabhedaḥ . . . bījānurūpatvāt phalasya* | Asaṅga. *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*, 10.

[180] Asaṅga. *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*, 20-21.

is quite natural, as this same text glosses the term *jinātmaja,* son of the Jina, with *bodhisattva* (verse 8.1).[181] I have touched here upon only the very surface of the meaning of *gotra* within Buddhist literature, and refer the reader to Dutt, Obermiller, Dayal, Lamotte, and most prominently David Ruegg for far more adequate investigations of this important topic.[182]

So far in this section I have presented a few points of interest: 1) Buddhist traditions know of a tripartite division of beings based upon their ultimate spiritual aspirations, 2) the Mahāyāna equates each of these aspirations with a particular *yāna* as well as with a spiritual disposition, a *gotra*, and 3) the Mahāyāna equated possession of the Buddha *gotra* with being a bodhisattva and belonging to the Buddha's family. Thus, as I claimed above, *Śākyabhikṣu* can be viewed as almost a synonym of *bodhisattva.* Bringing us back to the question with which I began this chapter, i.e., Ajaṇṭā's *yānic* affiliation, several of the Mahāyānist passages cited make yet another point: the equation of bodhisattva-hood with participation in the Mahāyāna. The *Bodhisattvabhūmi* claims that one of the Buddha *gotra*, a bodhisattva, should be nurtured to fruition in the Mahāyāna; this same text contains a simple apposition: the bodhisattva path, the Mahāyāna;[183] the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* cited above makes a similar equation; the

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[181] Asaṅga. *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*, 29.

[182] Nalinaksha Dutt. *Aspects of Mahāyāna Buddhism and its Relation to Hīnayāna.* (London: Luzac, 1930): 84f.; E. E. Obermiller. "The Sublime Science of the Great Vehicle to Salvation, Being a Manual of Buddhist Monism, The Work of Ārya Maitreya with a Commentary by Āryāsanga," *Acta Orientalia*. 9 (1931): 96-104; Har Dayal. *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature.* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1978): 51-53; Lamotte. *The Teaching of Vimalakīrti,* 303-307; David Seyfort Ruegg. *La Théorie du Tathāgatagarbha et du Gotra: Études sur la Sotériologie et la Gnoséologie du Bouddhisme*. Publications de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient. volume 70. (Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient 1969); David Seyfort Ruegg. "Pāli *Gotta/Gotra* and the Term *Gotrabhū* in Pāli and Buddhist Sanskrit." In *Buddhist Studies in Honour of I. B. Horner*. Ed. by L. Cousins, A. Kunst, and K. R. Norman. (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing 1974); David Seyfort Ruegg. "The Meanings of the Term *Gotra* and the Textual History of the *Ratnagotravibhāga*," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies.* 39 (1976): 341-363; David Seyfort Ruegg. "A Further Note on Pāli *Gotrabhū*," *Journal of the Pāli Text Society*. 9 (1981): 175-177.

[183] Asaṅga. *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, 1.

Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra claims that enthusiasm for Mahāyānist teachings is a sign that one belongs to the bodhisattva *gotra* (verse 3.5).[184] Indeed, as I also noted at the beginning of this chapter, Western scholars have taken the Mahāyāna literature's appropriation of the bodhisattva ideal as historical fact. Robinson's introductory textbook on Buddhism summarizes this view best: "Mahāyāna is synonymous with the course (*yāna*), or career (*caryā*), of the bodhisattva."[185] The remainder of this chapter will consider the question of whether the converse is valid as well, i.e., whether Asaṅga's claim that the Mahāyāna is truly the native ground of bodhisattvas[186] was Dharma for the Ś*ākyabhikṣus* at Ajaṇṭā; whether Ajaṇṭā's Ś*ākyabhikṣus*, monks concerned to affirm their spiritual gotra headed by Ś*ākyamuni* Buddha, necessarily belonged to the Mahāyāna.

Was Ajaṇṭā's Ś*ākyabhikṣu* saṅgha Mahāyānist? This question not only brings us back to the question at the beginning of this chapter, but also to the third scholar to offer a hypothesis for the meaning of Ś*ākyabhikṣu,* Gregory Schopen. In fact, Schopen's conclusions were very close to my own. Where I suggest that Ś*ākyabhikṣu* can be taken as an equivalent for bodhisattva, he proposes that "the term ś*ākyabhikṣu* . . . must be a title used to designate a member of the Mahāyāna community who was also a member of a monastic community."[187] Surely, the Mahāyānist ideology which holds that bodhisattvas are by definition Mahāyānists would reduce the gap between our positions. But is this correct? Schopen reached his conclusion by a careful, albeit convoluted series of reasonings (simplified here for clarity): 1) the epithet Ś*ākyabhikṣu* is used epigraphically in such a

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[184] Asaṅga. *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*, 11.

[185] Richard H. Robinson and Willard L. Johnson. *The Buddhist Religion: A Historical Introduction.* (Belmont CA: Wadsworth, 1982): 74.

[186] *mahāyānaṃ hi bodhisattvānām adhyātmam* | Asaṅga. *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*, 166, verse 19.66.

[187] Schopen. "Mahāyāna in Indian Inscriptions," 11.

way as to make clear that it is the "'property' of some group," 2) every time an inscription uses the term *Mahāyāna* it also uses the epithet *Śākyabhikṣu* (or a lay equivalent), 3) hence the group the *Śākyabhikṣus* belonged to was the Mahāyāna.[188] Unfortunately, Schopen's data is very problematic when it comes to fifth century Indian Buddhism, for he has only one inscription that uses both *Śākyabhikṣu* and Mahāyāna in this period,[189] and Mahāyāna is not found epigraphically again until the ninth or tenth century.[190] The polemic celebration of the Mahāyāna is evident throughout Mahāyānist treatises of this Ajaṇṭā's era and before, why did the Mahāyānists wait so long to tell true names in their inscriptions?

As one will recall, the "standard Mahāyāna" form of a donative inscription reads: "This is the religious donation of Śākyabhikṣu X. Whatever merit there is in it may that be for all beings' attainment of Unexcelled Knowledge." And, before setting off on my investigation of the *Śākyabhikṣus,* I promised to investigate two parts of this formula, the epithet and the dedication of merit. Moreover one will recall that Schopen also determined this formula used in this inscription for dedicating spiritual merit is "virtually the exclusive property of the Mahāyāna."[191] I have rendered this conclusion of Schopen's problematic as well, for it is based upon the high statistical correlation within Buddhist epigraphs of *Śākyabhikṣu* and this formula; if the *Śākyabhikṣus* were not necessarily Mahāyānists in the fifth century, neither is this formula.

Yet, well before Schopen's attempt to set this formula's *yānic* association upon an

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[188] Schopen. "Mahāyāna in Indian Inscriptions," 11.

[189] This is the Gunaighar grant of Vainyagupta referred to earlier in this chapter. Schopen thought he had a second piece of evidence, and from Ajaṇṭā at that (app. A., No. 90). In my reconsideration of this inscription, I have determined the proposed reading of *Mahāyāna* is all but impossible.

[190] Schopen. "Mahāyāna in Indian Inscriptions," 13-14.

[191] Schopen. "Mahāyāna in Indian Inscriptions," 12.

'objective' basis, scholars already referred to it as "a common Mahāyāna formula"[192] or "in the well-known *Mahāyāna* style"[193] or "of Mahāyāna origin."[194] Schopen observes that although he concurs with Johnston, et. al. vis-à-vis his conclusions, none of those scholars "has given any evidence to support his assertion."[195] Indeed, Schopen affirms that 'internal' evidence from Mahāyāna Buddhist literature cannot be the source of these scholars' unsupported insights, for "the vocabulary used to express the idea [of transferring merit] in our formula is not the vocabulary used to express the same idea in Mahāyāna literary sources."[196] The epigraphic formulation for transferring merit towards Buddhahood is "for the attainment of Unexcelled Knowledge" (*anuttarajñānāvāptaye*), whereas in Schopen's survey, Mahāyāna scriptures and exegetical treatises typically use a formulation that reads, "he turns [merit] over to Unexcelled, Perfect and Complete Awakening" (*anuttarasamyak-saṃbodhaye pariṇāmayati*). These two formulations differ in regard to the phrase used to describe the goal towards which merit is transferred (*anuttarajñāna* vs.*anuttara-samyaksaṃbodhi*), as well as the verb indicating transference (*ava-āp* vs. *pari-ṇam*).

In point of fact, Schopen is able to cite two examples from Mahāyānist literature in which *anuttarajñāna* is used: the *Kāśyapaparivarta* and the *Suvikrāntavirāmi-paripṛcchā*.[197] Needless to say, however, the question is begged if only Mahāyānist sources are searched for internal supportive evidence for this formula's Mahāyāna provenance. Returning to the ever-trusty MSV, on page 114 of the *Saṅghabhedavastu* alone, the

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[192] Johnston. "Some Sanskrit Inscriptions of Arakan," 366.

[193] M. Venkataramayya and C. B. Trivedi. "Four Buddhist Inscriptions from Phophnar Kalan," *Epigrapia Indica*. 37 (1967): 148.

[194] Shizutani, "Mahāyāna Inscriptions in the Gupta Period," 355.

[195] Schopen. "Mahāyāna in Indian Inscriptions," 7.

[196] Schopen. "Mahāyāna in Indian Inscriptions," 7.

[197] Schopen. "Mahāyāna in Indian Inscriptions," 17, n. 14.

expression *anuttarajñānam adhi-gam* occurs five times.[198] Of course, the verb *adhi-gam*, to realize, is not the same as the inscriptions' typical *ava-āp*, to attain. With this caveat noted, however, I think we can safely say that the MSV's *anuttarajñānam adhi-gam* can satisfy Schopen's failed search within Mahāyāna texts for this epigraphic formula's literary precedent. This expression is used throughout this text in instances where the realization of a bodhisattva's or disciple's attainment of Buddhahood is discussed, and is the phrase most often used in the MSV's narration of Śākyamuni's conquest under the Bodhi tree.[199] Schopen suggests that despite the difference of vocabulary between the epigraphic formula and the Mahāyāna sūtras they "express the same idea."[200] These two expressions' synonymity is exploited in the following passage from the MSV's *Bhaiṣajyavastu* (Chapter on Medicine), where *anuttarajñāna* and *anuttarasamyaksaṃbodhi* are used in the same passage. King Prasenajit wonders aloud why he has never received a prediction to Buddhahood although he is a very generous donor. The Buddha responds by telling the Māndhātā *jātaka*, after which the Buddha concludes: "What do you think, O Mahārāja, I was King Māndhātā at that time, in that era. [Yet,] I did not realize Unexcelled Knowledge on account of [actions] I performed for the benefit of [other] beings as [King Māndhātā]. Rather, this gift was merely a cause for, merely a support for Unexcelled, Complete and Perfect Awakening."[201]

Now the question is, if one looks to Buddhist literature for the precedents and

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[198] Gnoli. *Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabhedavastu*, vol. 1, 114.

[199] Cf. Dutt. *Gilgit Manuscripts*, vol. 3.1, 97, 243; Gnoli. *Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabhedavastu*, vol. 1, 83, 109, 111, 113, 114, 119, 120, 151.

[200] Schopen. "Mahāyāna in Indian Inscriptions," 7.

[201] *bhagavān āha | kiṃ manyase mahārāja yo 'sau rājā māndhātā aham eva sa tena kālena tena samayena | yan mayā itthaṃ sattvahitaṃ kṛtaṃ tena nānuttaraṃ jñānam adhigatam | kiṃ tv etad dānam anuttarāyāḥ samyaksaṃbodher hetumātrakaṃ saṃbhāramātrakaṃ* | Dutt. *Gilgit Manuscripts*, vol. 3.1, 97.

sources of this epigraphic formulation which is considered to be *prima facie* Mahāyānist because it expresses the bodhisattva ideal, and if the most likely precedent is found in the Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya, a text that is not Mahāyānist, do we or do we not call the monks who used this formula Mahāyānists?

To answer this question, and that of Ajaṇṭā's *yānic* affiliation, I must first review a crucial assumption about Buddhism's institutional history in India, widely accepted within the field. To wit, that several centuries after Śākyamuni's nirvāṇa the saṅgha split into numerous fraternities based upon diverging teachers' lineages, as well as disputes over doctrine and monastic practice. Native doxographers have traditionally numbered these sects (Sanskrit, *nikāyas*) as eighteen;[202] and Indian Buddhist literature and epigraphs make reference to "the monks of the eighteen *nikāyas*" as a metonymy for the saṅgha as a whole. The important point here is that modern scholars corporately equate the eighteen *nikāyas*, including the Mūlasarvāstivāda *nikāya*, with the Hīnayāna.

More significantly yet, scholars represent these *nikāyas* as a corporate group in contradistinction to the Mahāyāna. Such an understanding is witnessed, for example, in a recent monograph by Jan Nattier: her index includes the entry "Nikāya Buddhism (the 'eighteen schools')"[203] -- a terminology Nattier equates with, but prefers to, "Hīnayāna"[204] -- and she explicitly sets Nikāya and Mahāyāna Buddhisms in opposition on several

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[202] The number eighteen is the traditional count of Buddhist sects. A browse through any text on the subject, however, will quickly reveal that there were more than eighteen schools in total. For a summary of the fundamental Indian literature on the sects see Lamotte (*History of Indian Buddhism,* 517-548), which includes a bibliography of the principal secondary work on the Buddhist sects to his date. The terms "sect" and "school" are both found variously in the scholarly literature on Buddhism. As "school" generally connotes a group based around a particular doctrine or teacher, while "sect" carries no such definite implications, and as there were a multiplicity of reasons for the sects' divergence, I have used the latter term.

[203] Jan Nattier. *Once Upon a Future Time,* 314.

[204] Nattier. *Once Upon a Future Time,* 9, n. 1.

occasions.[205] Let me repeat, Nattier is not alone in drawing this equation; the institutional incommensurability between the Hīnayāna as comprised of the 'eighteen' *nikāyas* and the Mahāyāna is accepted wisdom within scholarship on Buddhism. This attitude -- further exemplified by the title of the finest study on the eighteen sects, André Bareau's *Les Sects Bouddhiques du Petit Vehicule*,[206] and Étienne Lamotte's calling the Sthavira, Mahāsāṃghika, Sarvāstivāda and Saṃmatīya *nikāyas* "the four principle Hīnayānist schools"[207] -- is succinctly reviewed by Heinz Bechert:

> That Mahāyāna itself is not to be conceived as a 'sect' is settled by unambiguous textual evidence. The formation of Mahāyāna is contrasted with Śrāvakayāna, the vehicle of the hearers, or Hīnayāna, the small vehicle i.e. with the old doctrine. The so-called 'sects', i.e. the nikāyas or vādas, on the other hand had come into being inside the development of Hīnayāna or Śrāvakayāna.[208]

Bechert's precis assumes the well-rehearsed account of Buddhism's institutional development: a linear branching of monastic assemblies due to disputes over cenobitic rule and doctrine resulted in the eighteen Hīnayāna *nikāyas*; the Mahāyāna, by contrast, had a diffuse origin, in which monks, nuns, and lay-persons drawn from many communities, with their multiplicity of doctrines, practices, and texts, were united around a common religious aspiration: to become Buddhas themselves for the benefit of all living beings.

Now, as one will recall, both Sarkar and Schopen used an inscription from Cave 22 (No. 90) as an important piece of evidence to support their interpretation of the epithet *Śākyabhikṣu*: Sarkar took the verse accompanying this dedication as an expression of the *Śākyabhikṣus'* Dharma; Schopen, relying upon Chakravarti's reading, thought the

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[205] Nattier. *Once Upon a Future Time,* 25, 89, 124, 127.

[206] André Bareau. *Les Sectes Bouddhiques du Petit Véhicule*. Publications de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient volume 38. (Saigon: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1955).

[207] Lamotte. *History of Indian Buddhism*, 548.

[208] Heinz Bechert. "Notes on the Formations of Buddhist Sects and the Origins of Mahāyāna." In *German Scholars on India.* (Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series, 1973): 11.

inscription used the term *Mahāyāna*. Prompted by these scholars' interest I reviewed Cave 22's disputed inscription while at Ajaṇṭā, and discovered that Chakravarti's "Mahāyāna" was impossible. But I also found more. In the place where this epigrapher had reconstructed "Mahāyāna," I read the term *Aparaśaila*. Along with the Mūlasarvāstivāda, *Aparaśaila* is the name of a *nikāya*, one of the 'eighteen'! This donor, whatever his status as a *Śākyabhikṣu*/bodhisattva, seems to have declared himself a member of a *nikāya*. And one cannot dispute that for modern scholars (to recite Bechert from above) "the formation of Mahāyāna is contrasted with the . . . Hīnayāna. . . . The . . . nikāyas . . . come into being inside the development of Hīnayāna." In short, this inscription transgresses the fundamental taxonomy by which we have constructed Buddhism's institutional history. Based upon this common understanding of the genealogical relationship between the *nikāyas* and the Mahāyāna, the prominence of the Mūlasarvāstivāda at Ajaṇṭā and this inscription in particular would suggest the site was in fact Hīnayānist![209]

Can a self-described member of a *nikāya* accept the bodhisattva vow and still be categorized as a Hīnayānist? Clearly, the answer has less to do with Buddhist history than with the scholarly conventions we adopt. This is a matter of definition, of "low order meaning" in Roy Rappaport's phrase.[210] It is a matter of fixing distinctions within a

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[209] In point of fact, Dieter Schlingloff has used a similar argument to show that Ajaṇṭā's so-called Mahāyāna phase was patronized by members of Hīnayāna sects. Schlingloff's claim is based upon the wide use of the MSV as a literary precedent for Ajaṇṭā's paintings: "pictorial subjects agree with the form of stories as they are recounted . . . within the tradition of Hīnayāna Buddhism. Pictorial representations of decidedly Mahāyānistic themes are not . . . to be found in Ajanta" (*Studies in the Ajanta Paintings*. [Delhi: Ajanta Books, 1988]: 175). Because Schlingloff understands the *nikāyas* and Mahāyāna to be institutionally incommensurable, he is forced to contend with data that contradicts this thesis, such as the numerous icons of the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara. Schlingloff dismisses this conundrum with a remarkable observation: "the worship of this Bodhisatva was not limited to the followers of the Mahāyāna; this is demonstrated primarily by evidence of the Avalokiteśvara cult that it is not unusual to find in regions of classical Hīnayāna-Buddhism like Ceylon" (175). However, this is mere equivocation on Schlingloff's part. He must be aware that the Mahāyāna had a prominent presence in Sri Lanka for much of the first millennium C.E., and that Avalokiteśvara's inclusion within the Sri Lanka's pantheon is a vestige of that period in the island's religious history.

[210] Roy A. Rappaport. *Ecology, Meaning, and Religion*. (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1979): 127.

hierarchy of meanings. In short, it is a question of taxonomy. How do we, should we, construct a taxonomic model of Buddhist institutions?

To understand what is stake in this question, let us review how taxonomies work. (The following discussion is indebted to F. Suppe's *The Semantic Conception of Theories.*)[211] Taxonomy is a means for organizing information whereby units of information, taxa, are clearly distinguished one from the other, enabling the coherent grouping of individuals with shared attributes. Differentiation occurs in terms of characteristics -- morphological, phylogenetic, functional, social, etc. -- resulting in a system of taxonomic categories capable of being emplotted on two axes, horizontally as well as vertically. The Linnaean system is the most familiar, allowing a quick reminder of how these two axes relate. The Bodhi tree of Śākyamuni Buddha, for instance, is categorized within Linnaean taxonomy as the species *Ficus religiosa*, of the genus *Ficus,* of the family *Moraceae*. Through these categories, the actual Bodhi tree in Bodh Gaya may be grouped with similar individuals at increasing levels of generalization, allowing horizontal differentiation of varying degrees. Thus the *Ficus bengalensis*, the Bodhi tree of Śākyamuni's mythical predecessor, Kāśyapa Buddha, is of the same family and genus as Śākyamuni's *Ficus religiosa,* but differs in species due to morphological variations. Any given taxon is characterized by the similarity of the members of its class, which are absolutely differentiated from members of other taxa within the taxonomy's universe *contingent upon the level of abstraction within the categorical hierarchy*.

Turning to Indian societies, we may abstract the *religious* from the *political* from the *economic* realm, for example, and call these "families." *Buddhism* would then be one "genus" of Indian religion, and *Hīnayāna Buddhism* one "species." According to this classic taxonomic model, a *nikāya*, a sub-species of the species *Hīnayāna Buddhism*

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[211] Frederick Suppe. *The Semantic Conception of Theories and Scientific Realism*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989).

cannot belong to another species, e.g., *Mahāyāna Buddhism*. The taxonomic architecture prohibits this vertically (recall Bechert from above: "Mahāyāna itself is not to be conceived as a 'sect'") as well as horizontally ("the nikāyas come into being inside the development of Hīnayāna"). Nevertheless, in terms of the particulars of religious life -- practices, monastic rule, and so on -- the Mahāyāna is continuous with one *nikāya* or another in many details. Mahāyānists might come from all *nikāyas*; yet there is an expectation that prior *nikāya* affiliations become moot once a *yānic* conversion is made. A clear understanding of the relationship between the Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna, accordingly, will depend upon the precision with which one maintains awareness of the relationships and logical levels between the contrasted entities. Although overlaps between an individual *nikāya* and the Mahāyāna may occur in selected individual characteristics, analytically the two remain absolutely separate.

Now, in the broadest terms, taxonomies come in two flavors, "natural" and "artificial." Taxa definitions in natural taxonomies are considered to have a natural basis in reality; they "are factually true or false assertions about the characteristics distinctive of [their] members."[212] In artificial taxonomies, categories are defined according to arbitrary and functional conventions. Accordingly, when we seek to classify these two 'species' of Buddhism, we must first decide whether we want this classificatory system to conform to, and describe, historical actualities on their own terms, reconstructed through available evidence; or whether it should be treated as a conventional construction, stipulatively defined so as to yield a useful analysis of whatever specific material is at hand. In point of fact, Suppe attests that many current theorists of taxonomy are suspicious of terms often used for natural taxonomies (such as "natural," "intrinsic property," and "empirically true"),

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[212] Suppe. *Semantic Conception*, 248.

and believe that only conventional taxonomies are possible;[213] post-structuralists can readily demonstrate that most anything "natural" is always already constructed, conventional. However, there is no reason to believe that scholars of Buddhism have heretofore sought anything but a natural, historical understanding of the *yānas*: such criticisms stand beyond the scope of this investigation.

For a taxonomy to be natural, the taxa must be defined so that there is "a single intrinsic property characteristic of all and only those individuals belonging to a given taxon."[214] The Linnaean system attempts to maintain fidelity to nature by classifying individuals within taxa defined according to "*all* characteristics of the organism, where these become necessary and sufficient characteristics for species membership."[215] This totalistic essentialism is unthinkable for our post-Darwinian world, wherein species are not immutably fixed by God himself. To make 'Mahāyāna' and 'Hīnayāna' work as natural taxa we need but a single intrinsic property characteristic of all members of the Mahāyāna and another characteristic of all Hīnayānists. In this study, I have suggested that modern scholars' view the Mahāyāna's essential property as its members' acceptance of the bodhisattva ideal as an active religious model; the Hīnayāna's, as its members' identification with a specific nikāya. Membership in the Mahāyāna is diagnosed primarily by an ideological position; membership in the Hīnayāna by an institutional affiliation. Yet, according to my reading of the Cave 22 inscription, for instance, we have a self-identified member of the Aparaśaila *nikāya* committing himself to the quintessential Mahāyānist aspiration as a Ś*ākyabhikṣu*. In view of this inscription how do we maintain a strict analytic separation between taxa, such that every individual fits into only a single taxon?

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[213] Suppe. *Semantic Conception,* 249.

[214] Suppe. *Semantic Conception,* 217.

[215] Suppe. *Semantic Conception,* 206.

Do we choose (1) the nominal separation between the *nikāyas* and the Mahāyāna as our criterion for categorizing the *yānic* affiliation of the Cave 22 donor? Or do we choose as criteria (2) the tenets and practices this donor accepts within his epigraph?

Selection of the former possibility leads to an identification of this donor with the Hīnayāna; select the latter and he is a Mahāyānist. In natural taxonomies "the definitional form for given taxa in a domain is a question of empirical fact."[216] Accordingly, if we choose the first alternative, 'Mahāyāna' and 'Hīnayāna' are meaningful as naturally defined taxa insofar as they are defined through data that explicitly communicates a *nikāya* or *yāna* affiliation. Such a taxonomy could not support generalizations about the *yānic* substrate of Buddhist ideologies and practices: the unqualified identification of the *bodhisattvayāna* with the Mahāyāna, so prevalent in scholarship on Buddhism, would have to be relinquished. Selection of the second alternative leads to the conclusion that an individual's membership in one of the *nikāyas* cannot be treated as having a predictive value for his *yānic* affiliation. This, in turn, means that the prevailing conception of the *nikāyas* as sub-species of the Hīnayāna should be aborted. Here the Mahāyāna/Hīnayāna distinction can be preserved on the level of doctrine and practice, but loses most of its significance as a handle for Indian Buddhist institutional history.

Can a member of a *nikāya* accept the bodhisattva vow and still be categorized as a Hīnayānist? If one assents to this proposition, then one treats Hīnayāna/Mahāyāna as a pair of institutional taxa whose members are best determined through sociological and demographic studies. If one denies the assertion, then the *yānas* retain their value as categories for Buddhist ideology, and the nomological and doxographical literatures of Buddhism remain principle sources for their definition. The trade off is that these taxa will lose value as institutional indices, except where direct, explicit evidence for an individual's

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[216] Suppe. *Semantic Conception,* 248.

yānic affiliation is preserved. However, since we possess no evidence for a Buddhist affirming his inclusion within the "Hīnayāna" akin to Asaṅga's professions vis-à-vis the Mahāyāna, we are left with a history of Indian Buddhism that includes a few self-declared Mahāyānists, a few members of various *nikāyas* -- albeit of unknown *yānic* affiliation -- and no Hīnayānists at all. Mahāyāna/Hīnayāna becomes an odd distinction indeed.

I introduced this chapter by expressing my own puzzlement over the typical characterization of Ajaṇṭā's Vākāṭaka phase as "Mahāyānist." To be sure, the taxonomic distinction between Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna taxa make our lives simpler when talking or writing about Buddhism in India. But (to paraphrase Geertz) they formulate a conceptual ordering of Buddhism and clothe this conception with such an aura of factuality that it seems uniquely realistic; they are icons, in both senses, Piercean and devotional. Of all the categories through which to reconstruct the Indian Buddhist history, Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna are the most productive. Nevertheless, our reconstructions have a secret life of their own. Each *yāna* can be defined positively, through a necessary and sufficient characteristic for individuals' membership within that taxon. Moreover, because these two *yānas* are logical opposites, each can also be defined negatively, through its lack of the other's necessary and sufficient characteristic. However, in both cases, these positive and negative definitions are not conceptually equivalent. That is, the Mahāyāna is positively characterized by its members' pursuit of the bodhisattva path; the Hīnayāna is negatively characterized as the non-Mahāyāna, i.e., its members do not pursue Buddhahood as their ideal. However, when positively characterized, the Hīnayāna is defined by members' affiliation with one or another *nikāya,* which, of course, means that the Mahāyāna is known negatively by its members' institutional separation from those same *nikāyas.* In short, discourse on the *yānas* has treated an apples-and-oranges distinction as one of apples alone.

Finally, perhaps the only single intrinsic property characteristic of everything Mahāyānist is that it is not Hīnayānist, and vice versa. Here we are left with the Mahāyāna/Hīnayāna distinction as a mere structural dualism devoid of specific content, a mere nominalism. This conclusion hardly yields a worthwhile definition of these taxa appropriate for historical research. Nevertheless, it is possible to construct natural, historical, and meaningful taxonomies based upon these *yānas,* wherein all individuals within each taxon possess at least one element in common, and that element does not belong to members of the other *yāna.* To realize this possibility, we must recognize that taxonomic schemes, like maps, are appropriate only to restricted domains. One can create more than one taxonomic scheme using a single set of data; change the way taxa are defined, the model's conceptual universe, and the categorization of members, may change as well. We do not labor within a Linnaean universe where individuals are defined only by the totality of their characteristics. Ajaṇṭā's Ś*ākyabhikṣus,* one an Aparaśaila, many probably Mūlasarvāstivādin, can be both "Mahāyānists" and "Hīnayānists," albeit not within the same taxonomic moment. Our approach to the Dharma of Ajaṇṭā's Ś*ākyabhikṣu* saṅgha must rely upon an hermeneutic sensitive to, and respectful of, the many divergent discursive, historical, institutional, psychological, practical, ideological, and social contexts within which we use these analytic categories. In there end, there is no Mahāyāna/Hīnayāna distinction: there are many.

To conclude: When introducing my discussion of the Ś*ākyabhikṣus*, I noted two uses of this epithet within Buddhist literary sources. The first came from the MSV. The second is found in the introductory verses of the *Samayabhedoparacakra,* a doxographical text devoted the origins and tenets of the eighteen *nikāyas*. This text, unfortunately, does not come to us in Sanskrit, but was preserved in Chinese and Tibetan translations. In fact, it was translated into Chinese three times -- in the Ts'in (385-431),

putatively by Kumārajīva, between the years 557 and 569 by Paramārtha, and in 662 by Hsüan-Tsang; the Tibetan translation was made in the ninth century by Dharmākara.[217] I recount these details of the text's transmission, for the verse in which one finds *Śākyabhikṣu* was not part of the Ts'in period translation.[218] Thus, one can surmise that this verse's characterization of Vasumitra was a follower's view, and not Vasumitra's own personal assessment. According to this verse, "Vasumitra, possessed of wisdom, [was] an enlightened Śākyabhikṣu, a bodhisattva of great knowledge."[219]

What makes this characterization of Vasumitra so interesting, and the reason I kept him for this chapter's end, is because of who Vasumitra was. Far from being a luminary in the Mahāyāna commentarial tradition, this *Śākyabhikṣu* is considered a co-author of the *Mahāvibhāṣā*,[220] a Sarvāstivādin text whose title came to be eponymous with Hīnayānist doctrine in India. According to a tradition recorded by Hsüan-Tsang,[221] the *Mahāvibhāṣā* was compiled at a council convened by King Kaniṣka for the purpose of reconciling differences between the *nikāyas*, and making the saṅgha whole. At first, the arhats present in Kaniṣka's realm forbade Vasumitra from joining the assembly, because Vasumitra had not yet attained arhatship. Little did they know that Vasumitra was a bodhisattva, disinterested in such attainments, for he sought "only the fruit of Buddha." To prove his spiritual merit to the arhat-elite, Vasumitra cast a ball in the air, declaring that by the time it

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[217] André Bareau. "Trois Traités sur les Sectes Bouddhiques Attribués à Vasumitra, Bhavya et Vinītadeva, première partie," *Journal Asiatique*. 242 (1954): 231.

[218] Bareau. "Trois Traités sur les Sectes Bouddhiques," 235.

[219] *de tshe dbyig bshes blo ldan pa | śākya'i dge slong blo chen po | byang chub sems dpa' blo gros che | phyad par sems la brtag bya ste* | Enga Teramoto and Tomotsugu Hiramatsu (eds). *Samaya-bhedoparacanakra.* (Kyoto, 1935): 1.

[220] Jiryo Masuda. "Origin and Doctines of the Early Indian Buddhist Schools," *Asia Major*. 2 (1925): 7-9.

[221] Hsüan-Tsang. *Si-yu Ki*, vol. 1, 151-6; Thomas Watters. *On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India (A.D. 629-645)*. (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1973): vol. 1, 270-278.

hit the earth he too would be an arhat; its fall was stopped by the gods, who asked Vasumitra why he sought such a meager fruit, given that he was destined to be the next Buddha following Maitreya. In consequence of this miracle, Kaśmīr's arhats made Vasumitra the president of their convocation. Although Hsüan-Tsang's tale affords the fullest account of this convocation, Demiéville records that Vasumitra's status as the sixth Buddha of our age was accepted at least as early as the year 384 C.E.[222] With this background, one can well understand the verses interpolated into the introduction to Vasumitra's *Samayabhedopacaracakra:* that he is wise, enlightened, a bodhisattva, and a Ś*ākyabhikṣu*.

But, Vasumitra was also belonged to the Hīnayāna. And not only was the work of Hīnayāna philosophy *par excellence* said to be composed under the stewardship of bodhisattva Śākyabhikṣu Vasumitra. In point of fact, Przyluski[223] and Lamotte[224] both suggest that the Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya itself was first complied in this same council. Thus we would have Maitreya's successor in the *Tathāgatavaṃśa* as a patriarch of the Mūlasarvāstivāda school vis-à-vis its doctrines and it vinaya, the charter of its institutional integrity. Demiéville refers to Vasumitra as a '*bodhisattva-bhikṣu*,' his persona reflecting a conflict between the Great and Little Vehicles,[225] but not committed to either. As Ś*ākyabhikṣu* Vasumitra, so Ajaṇṭā.

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[222] Demiéville. "La Yogācārabhūmi de Saṅgharakṣa," 366-8.

[223] Jean Przyluski. *The Legend of Emperor Aśoka in Indian and Chinese Texts.* Trans. by D. K. Biswas. (Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1967): vii.

[224] Lamotte. *History of Indian Buddhism*, 174.

[225] Demiéville. "La Yogācārabhūmi de Saṅgharakṣa," 366.

CHAPTER V

BUDDHA: AJAṆṬĀ'S IDEAL SAVIOR

In the preceding chapter I argued that one fundament of Ajaṇṭā's Ś*ākyabhikṣus*' Dharma was the concern to establish and legitimate their inclusion within the family of Śākyamuni, and by extension the lineage of Tathāgatas. In this way, these Ś*ākyabhikṣus* showed themselves to be bodhisattvas; many sought the attainment of Unexcelled Knowledge for themselves and others. Further, I argued that although both Western scholarship and Indian Mahāyānist polemics tend to equate the bodhisattva-*yāna* with the Mahāyāna, this correlation cannot be presupposed to have historical verity for Ajaṇṭā. Whereas Mahāyānist literature and doctrine do take the bodhisattva's development and practices as a primary focus, in the person of Vasumitra one finds the possibility that India's Ś*ākyabhikṣus* need not have entered on to the Great Vehicle. Indeed, Vasumitra's intimate association with Sarvāstivādin doctrine and, perhaps, the Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya, leaves the *yānic* issue wide open.

This present chapter will address the sort of Buddha Ajaṇṭā's Ś*ākyabhikṣus* may have sought to become. We have a sense that, at Ajaṇṭā, Śākyamuni Buddha played a parental, even ancestral, role. But there remains the question of what it would have meant for one's spiritual progenitor to be a figure who, in Buddhabhadra's words, has departed for the City of Tranquility, which has no fixed location, yet still accomplishes the aims of living beings (app. A, No. 93, verse 2). The Buddha was at once the Ś*ākyabhikṣus'* ideal and goal, the final and formal cause of their religious life. Nevertheless, as a present absence and absent presence, the Buddha's identity was fluid; his position within this

community, like the location of his nirvāṇa itself, was not fixed.

Étienne Lamotte has presented Indian Buddhology as in tension between two basic hermeneutic modes -- the 'supermundane' and the 'rationalist' -- and he uses the lotus flower as a trope for their explication. Lamotte writes, "The *Logion of the Lotus,* introduced in Buddhist Sūtras established a comparison between the lotus 'born and grown in the water, rising above the water and not sullied by the water' and the Tathāgata 'born in the world, grown in the world, having dominated the world and remaining unsullied by the world.' . . . Two responses, each having an infinity of nuances, have been proposed. Under the impulse of religious sentiment, certain Hīnayānist sects, followed by the great Mahāyānist schools, subtract the Buddha from the world-of-becoming and do not impute to him any form of existence. His manifestation within the world is a pure and simple fiction. . . . Other Hīnayānist sects, interpreting the old canonical texts, give a more rational response. Śākyamuni in the course of his last existence and after his Awakening was both man and Buddha, or, more exactly, Buddha while remaining provisionally human."[1] This chapter will explore some of the ramifications of a tension between these two modalities of Buddhahood as they were played out at Ajaṇṭā.

The Miracle and the Descent

Let us begin with the simple observation that Śākyamuni Buddha, whatever the idiosyncracies of his life and 'ministry,' participated in an ideal type. The Theravādins stand at the far edge of Lamotte's rationalist Buddhology, for which Buddha is Man perfected. One may expect, therefore, that the Theravāda Buddha was a unique individual in the same way that all humans are unique individuals. Yet one finds that, when a single norm

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[1] Étienne Lamotte. "Lotus et Buddha Supramondain," *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême Orient.* 69 (1981): 44.

of human perfection obtains, all perfect humans are very much the same. In the *Sampasādaniya Sutta* of the *Dīgha nikāya,* for instance, Śāriputra is taken to task by Śākyamuni for making what the Buddha considers to be a false, if ecstatic, statement. Śāriputra proclaims, "Lord! such faith have I in the Exalted One, that methinks there never has been, nor will be, nor is there now any other . . . who is greater and wiser than the Exalted One."[2] Śākyamuni gently mocks Śāriputra, whose spiritual-eye is myopic when compared with that of a Buddha, instructing him that "in times gone and in future times there have been, and will be other Supreme Buddhas equal to himself in the matter of Enlightenment, yet that in one and the same world-system there should arise two Arahants, Buddhas Supreme, the one neither before nor after the other:-- that is impossible and unprecedented. That cannot be."[3] Though Śākyamuni is Śāriputra's Buddha, and is uniquely perfect within the present age, Śākyamuni is simply one of a long line of equally perfect figures. Indeed, as has been often noted, a reverence for Śākyamuni's Buddha predecessors is evidenced at least as early as the period of Aśoka, whose Nigālī Sagar pillar commemorated the enlargement and worshipping of a stūpa dedicated to Buddha Konākamana by Aśoka.[4]

In this way, Śākyamuni is one in an infinite progression of Buddhas. Nor is he the last: Buddhist traditions universally acknowledge Maitreya as Śākyamuni's successor; and as I noted at the end of the last chapter, the Sarvāstivādins believed that Vasumitra would be the next Buddha to Awaken after Maitreya. But with this mention of future Buddhas I

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[2] T. W. and C. A. F. Rhys Davids (trans). *Dialogues of the Buddha.* (London: Pāli Text Society, 1977): part 3, 95.

[3] Davids. *Dialogues of the Buddha,* part 3, 108-9.

[4] E. Hultzsch. *Inscriptions of Aśoka.* Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, volume 1. (Delhi: Director General, Archaeological Survey of India, 1991): 165; Alfred C. Woolner. "Niglīva Dedication," *Aśoka Text and Glossary.* (Delhi: Panjab University Oriental Publications, 1982): 51.

am getting ahead of myself. For Western scholars, the *locus classicus* for a presentation of Śākyamuni as one in a progression of Buddhas is the Sarvāstivādin *Mahāvadāna Sūtra*[5] (and its Pāli equivalent, the *Mahāpadāna Sutta*[6]). This text focusses upon the life story of Vipaśyin, a Buddha who lived 91 aeons ago. Most significantly, the *Mahāvadāna Sūtra* presents Vipaśyin's life as a paradigm for the lives of all Buddhas. Though the parallel details of Buddhas' lives differ -- e.g., their castes and clans, the trees under which they gain Awakening, the names of their two chief disciples, and so on -- Buddhas are equivalent insofar as the actual events in their lives on earth are virtually identical. A Buddha always descends from Tuṣita heaven; a Buddha always stands after his birth, and proclaims this to be his final life; a Buddha's mother always dies seven days thereafter. This compulsory nature of a Buddha's life to conform to an ideal is signalled within this text by a term which introduces every major event: *dharmatā*. When something is *dharmatā* it is natural, to be expected, in the order of things. As the events in a Buddha's life are *dharmatā*, we might say that the very nature of the world requires Buddhas to act just as they do. A Buddha who does not live an archetypical Buddha's life is no Buddha at all.

Whereas the consistency of Buddhas' lives is a point of universal agreement among the various Buddhist traditions, the actual events and actions that define the Buddha's exemplum are not thus fixed. By way of example, the *Ratnagotravibhāga*, a Mahāyānist *śāstra,* enumerates 12 principle acts;[7] the commentary to the *Buddhavaṃsa,* a Sri Lankan

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[5] Ernst Waldschmidt. *Das Mahāvadānasūtra.* Abhandlungen der Deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin. Klasse für Sprachen, Literatur un Kunst. Jahrgang 1952 Nr. 8 / Jahrgang 1954 Nr. 3. (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1953-56).

[6] Davids. *Dialogues of the Buddha,* part 2, 4-41.

[7] E. H. Johnston (ed). "The Ratnagotravibhāga Mahāyānottaratantraśāstra." Appendix to *Journal of Bihar Research Society.* 36 (1950): 87-88; E. E. Obermiller. "The Sublime Science of the Great Vehicle to Salvation, Being a Manual of Buddhist Monism, The Work of Ārya Maitreya with a Commentary by Āryāsanga," *Acta Orientalia.* 9 (1931): 254-55; Jikido Takasaki. *A Study on the Ratnagotravibhāga (Uttaratantra): Being a Treatise on the Tathāgatagarbha Theory of Mahāyāna Buddhism.* (Rome: Instituto Italiano per il Medio

chronicle of Śākyamuni and his twenty-four predecessors, mentions Buddhas as having thirty identical deeds.[8] For our purposes, of course, the most interesting typification of the Buddhas' life will be one found in the Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya and its related text, the *Divyāvadāna*, wherein Buddhas are presented as necessarily accomplishing ten acts before they enter nirvāṇa:

> It is the rule (*dharmatā*) that living, abiding, existing, animate Buddhas, Blessed Ones must necessarily accomplish ten [deeds]. A Buddha, Blessed One does not enter nirvāṇa as long as 1) the Buddha has not predicted that [another will become] a Buddha; 2) a second person has not conceived an irreversible aspiration for Unexcelled, Complete and Perfect Awakening; 3) all beings who can be converted by the Buddha are [not] converted; 4) three-quarters of [the Buddha's] life-span has [not] elapsed; 5) [the Buddha] has [not] marked out a *sīmā*; 6) [the Buddha] has [not] designated two of his Śrāvakas as supreme; 7) [the Buddha] has [not] displayed [himself] descending from the *devas* in the town of Sāṃkāśya; 8) on [the shore] of Anavapta lake, [the Buddha] together with [his] Śrāvakas have [not] exposited the thread of previous actions; 9) [the Buddha's] parents are [not] established in the Truth; 10) [the Buddha] does [not] display a great miracle in Śrāvastī.[9]

Whereas all of these acts were doubtless fraught with significance, I wish to call attention to two in particular: the descent from the *devas* in Sāṃkāśya and the great miracle in Śrāvastī. To begin, these two acts are further privileged within Buddhist traditions, for memorials of their occurrence were included within the paradigmatic circuit

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ed Estremo Oriente, 1966): 329-31.

[8] Étienne Lamotte. *History of Indian Buddhism: From the Origins to the Śaka Era.* Trans. by Sara Webb-Boin (Louvain: Peeters Press, 1988): 661.

[9] *dharmatā khalu buddhānāṃ bhagavatāṃ jīvatāṃ tiṣṭhatāṃ driyamānānāṃ yāpayatāṃ yaduta daśāvaśyakaraṇīyāni bhavanti* | *na tāvad buddhā bhagavantaḥ parinirvānti yāvan na buddho buddhaṃ vyākaroti, yāvan na dvitīyena sattvenāparivartyam anuttarāyāṃ samyaksaṃbodhau cittam utpāditaṃ bhavati, sarvabuddhavaineyā vinītā bhavanti, tribhāga āyuṣa utsṛṣṭo bhavati, sīmābandhaḥ kṛto bhavati, śrāvakayugam agratāyāṃ nirdiṣṭaṃ bhavati, sāṃkāśye nagare devatāvataraṇaṃ vidarśitaṃ bhavati, anavatapte mahāsarasi śrāvakaiḥ sārdhaṃ pūrvikā karmaplotir vyākṛtā bhavati, mātāpitarau satyeṣu pratiṣṭhāpitau bhavataḥ, śrāvastyāṃ mahāpratihāryaṃ vidarśitaṃ bhavati* | Edward Byles Cowell and R. A. Neil (eds). *The Divyāvadāna.* (Delhi: Indological Book House, 1987): 150. A similar list is found in the MSV (Nalinaksha Dutt [ed.] *Gilgit Manuscripts.* [Delhi: Sri Satguru, 1984]: vol. 3.1, 163).

of Buddhist pilgrimage in central India; they were counted as two of eight great caityas.[10] Moreover, as one will recall, the great miracle and descent are the only events from the Buddha's life that the MSV stipulates as necessarily depicted within a monastery's precincts: "in the vestibule (*niryūha*), the Great Miracle [at Śrāvastī] . . . in the assembly hall (*upasthānaśala*), the most venerable monk [=Buddha] descending to teach the Dharma." One may suspect, accordingly that these two acts held great import for Ajaṇṭā's monks. And indeed, although the placement of these scenes at Ajaṇṭā does not always coincide with the location stipulated by the MSV, programmatic depictions of them both are present: the great miracle at Śrāvastī can be found in Caves 1, lower 6, 7, 11, 16, 17 (intrusive variations on this theme were painted and incised in many more caves as well); the descent from Sāṃkāśya is still to be found in Caves 16 (where it is depicted twice: once on the veranda, and once inside the hall) and 17. As always let me reiterate, the fact that we do not know of these scenes in other caves does not necessarily mean that in some cases they could not have been painted therein at one time, or that, given Ajaṇṭā's troubled history, they may not have been included within iconographic programmes which never reached fruition.

I would propose, in brief, that the great miracle at Śrāvastī and descent at Sāṃkāśya together provide the foundation for unpacking one set of symbolisms and canons associated with Buddha at Ajaṇṭā. Although these events are enumerated as separate

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[10] See John C. Huntington ("Pilgrimage as Image: The Cult of the *Aṣṭamahāpratihārya,*" *Orientations* 18 [April 1987]: 55-63) and the companion articles to which he refers in the note on p. 55 for a more detailed discussion of Buddhist pilgrimage to these eight sites. As Huntington observes, there are no 'early' literary basis for this division into eight paradigmatic sites. In fact, Huntington dates "the earliest surviving stele depicting in detail the exact set" of eight scenes to the late 5th century ("Pilgrimage as Image," 62). P. C. Bagchi provides a list of works in Tibetan and Chinese dedicated to the worship of these eight sites, none may be dated to a period earlier than that of King Harṣa Śīlāditya, a contemporary of Hsüan-Tsang ("The Eight Great Caityas and their Cult," *Indian Historical Quarterly* 2 [1941]: 223-235). Finally, see Sylvain Lévi. "Une poésie inconnue du roi Harṣa Śīlāditya" *Actes du X^e Congrès international des Orientalistes*. 2 (1897): 189-203.

moments in a Buddha's paradigmatic life, in fact they are two parts of one story. By way of an introduction to the web of associations attached to the great miracle and the descent from the gods, allow me to recount the underlying tale, citing Rockhill's summary of the Mūlasarvāstivādin vinaya at length (the accompanying plates are taken from the depictions of these two events on the right and left walls of Cave 17's Buddha-shrine antechamber):

> Buddhist works mention six principal philosophical masters who were the chief opponents of the Buddha. . . . They were Pūrṇa-Kāçyapa, (Maskari)-Goçala, Sanjaya son of Vairatī, Ajita-Keçakambala, Kakuda-Katyāyana, and Nirgrantha son of Jñāta. . . . [T]hey all claimed to be great magicians, and as they felt the Buddha was depriving them of their popularity, they decided to have a public trial, which would establish their supernatural powers and superiority over the Çramana Gautama. Prasenadjit, king of Kosala, had everything made ready in place between Çravasti and Jetavana; the Buddha performed such wonderful feats that the tirthikas dared not show their inferiority, so they fled in dismay (Fig. 68). The most prominent of these six was Pūrṇa-Kāçyapa, "a man who went naked in the villages before all the world." . . . He could no longer reason, so with wandering mind he also ran away. As he went along he met a eunuch, who recognized him and said, "Whence comest thou, thus crestfallen, like a ram with broken horns? Ignorant though thou art of the truth (taught by) the Çākya, though thou wanderest about without shame like an ass." Then Pūrṇa-Kāçyapa told him that he was seeking a lovely pool full of cool water, in which he wished to clean himself of the dirt and dust of the road. When the eunuch had pointed it out to him, he went there, and fastening around his neck a jar full of sand, he threw himself into the water and was drowned.[11]

Rockhill neglects to provide a description of the Buddha's miracle itself, although this is typically the moment in this narration that is depicted in Buddhist art. According to the *Divyāvadāna*:

> The Blessed One conceived a mundane thought. . . . Then it occurred to the gods beginning with Śakra and Brahmā: 'Why has the Blessed One conceived a mundane thought?' And they considered, '[The Buddha] desires to display a great miracle in Śrāvastī for the benefit of living beings.' . . . Then Brahmā and the gods [in his retinue] circumambulated the Blessed One three times, bowed to the Blessed One's feet, and sat to the right. Śakra and the gods [in his retinue] circumambulated the Blessed One three times, bowed to the Blessed One's feet, and sat to the left. The Nāga kings Nanda and Upananda conjured [and] placed before the Blessed One a lotus, whose thousand petals were as large as wagon wheels, entirely

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[11] W. Woodville Rockhill. *The Life of the Buddha and the Early History of his Order Derived from Tibetan Works in the bkah-hgyur and bstan-hgyur.* (New Delhi: Navrang, 1991): 80-81.

> golden, [and] studded with jewels. The Blessed One sat on the lotus's pericap. Then after bending [his legs] into the lotus-position, holding his body erect, and setting his awareness before him, [the Blessed One] conjured a lotus on top of [that] lotus upon which sat a second Blessed One, legs crossed. Similarly in front, behind, and to the sides as well, the Buddha Blessed One conjured a mass of Buddhas; [reaching] as far as Akaniṣṭha heaven, the Buddhas Blessed Ones formed in assembly (Figs. 69, 70). Some of the conjured Buddhas walked, some stood, some sat, some reclined. Further, they entered into the fire-element, and performed the miracles of flaming, burning, raining, and flashing. Some asked questions; others replied, speaking a pair of verses (Fig. 71). . . . Thus empowered by the Blessed One, the entire world, including even young children, saw a garland of Buddhas without obstruction, [reaching] as far as Akaniṣṭha heaven.[12]

Rockhill's narrative summary then continues:

> After defeating the tirthikas the Buddha vanished from amidst his disciples and went to Trayastrimcat heaven, where, seated on a slab of white stone in a beautiful give of parijātaka and kobidharaka (*sic*) trees, he instructed his mother and a host of devas (Fig. 72). . . .
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> The disciples were greatly worried at the Buddha's disappearance, and

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[12] *bhagavatā laukikaṃ cittam utpāditam* | *. . . atha śakrabrahmādīnāṃ devānām etad abhavat* | *kimarthaṃ bhagavatā laukikaṃ cittam utpāditam* | *teṣām etad abhavat* | *śrāvastyāṃ mahāprātihāryaṃ nidarśayitukāmo hitāya prāṇinām* | *. . . atha brahmādayo devā bhagavantaṃ triḥ pradakṣiṇīkṛtya bhagavataḥ pādau śirasā vanditvā dakṣiṇaṃ pārśvaṃ niśritya niṣaṇṇāḥ* | *śakrādayo devā bhagavantaṃ triḥ pradakṣiṇīkṛtya bhagavataḥ pādau śirasā vanditvā vāmaṃ pārśvaṃ niśritya niṣaṇṇāḥ* | *nandopanadābhyāṃ nāgarājābhyāṃ bhagavata upanāmitaṃ nirmitaṃ sahasrapattraṃ śakaṭacakramātraṃ sarvasauvarnaṃ ratnadaṇḍaṃ padmam* | *bhagavāṃś ca padmakarṇikāyāṃ niṣaṇṇaḥ paryaṅkam ābhujya ṛjuṃ kāyaṃ praṇidhāya pratimukhaṃ smṛtim upasthāpya padmasyopari padmaṃ nirmitam* | *tatrāpi bhagavān paryaṅkaniṣaṇṇaḥ* | *evam agrataḥ pṛṣṭhataḥ pārśvataḥ* | *evaṃ bhagavatā buddhapiṇḍī nirmitā yāvad akaniṣṭhabhavanam upādāya buddhā bhagavanto parṣannirmataṃ* | *kecid buddhanirmāṇāś caṅkramyante kecit tiṣṭhanti kecin niṣiḍanti kecic chayyāṃ kalpayanti tejodhātum api samāpadyante jvalanatapanavarṣaṇavidyotanaprātihāryāṇi kurvanti* | *anye praśnān pṛcchanty anye visarjayanti gāthādvyaṃ bhāṣante . . . bhagavatā tathādhiṣṭitaṃ yathā sarvaloko 'nāvṛtaṃ adrākṣīd buddhāvataṃsakaṃ yāvad akaniṣṭhabhvanam upādāya antato bāladārakā api* | Cowell and Neil. *Divyāvadāna*, 162-3.

I have cited this portion of the *Divyāvadāna's* "Prātihāryasūtra," for this particular part of the story is that most often associated with Ajaṇṭā's depictions of the Śrāvastī 'miracle.' However, as Robert L. Brown ("The Śrāvastī Miracles in the Art of India and Dvāravatī," *Archives of Asian Art.* 37 (1984): 79-95) rightly points out, in the *Divyāvadāna's* depiction of the events at Śrāvastī, the Buddha performs not one miracle, but a series of supernatural actions, including the so-called *yamakaprātihārya*, or twin miracle, wherein the Buddha alternately shoots out fire and water from his shoulders and feet while he lifts into the air. See Brown's article for references to additional characterizations of the Buddha's Great Miracle, both literary and plastic.

> questioned Maudgalyayana, who told them where the Blessed One was. When three months had passed away the disciples sought Maudgalyayana again, and told him that they wanted to see the Buddha, that they thirsted after him. Maudgalyayana, by the power of samadhi, went to the Trayastrimcat devas' heaven, and told the Buddha how all the people of Jambudvipa longed to see him (Fig. 73). The Blessed One bid him return and tell the disciples that after seven days he would return to them, and would be at the foot of the udumbara tree of the Avadjaravana (*sic*) of the town of Sāmkaçya in Jambudvipa. Then the Buddha visited many other abodes of the devas, teaching them all the truth; after which he descended to the earthy by a vaīdurya (lapis lazuli) staircase, while Brahmā, bearing a jewelled yak tail, descended a golden one on his right together with all the gods of the Rūpaloka, and Çataketu (Indra), bearing a hundred-ribbed parasol over him, descended by a crystal staircase on his left accompanied by all the devas of the Kamaloka (Fig. 74).
>
> Now the bhikshuni Utpalavarnā saw the Blessed One descending to earth, so she took the appearance of an emperor (*Chakravartin*), and there came to honour him. [King] Udayin, who was also there, recognized her by the sweet odour that her body emitted; but the Blessed One rebuked her, saying, "It is not seeming in a bhikshuni to perform magical feats in the presence of the Master." (Plate 6-8) Then he sent her away.[13]

To reiterate the claim with which I introduced this retelling of three months in Śākyamuni's life, and indeed that of all Buddhas: the great miracle in Śrāvastī and the descent at Sāṃkāśya jointly encode the multivalent significances associated with the figure of Buddha; through their narrative and, in Cave 17 at least, pictorial pairing, they give expression to the tensions between what Lamotte has characterized as 'supermundane' and 'rationalist' Buddhologies.

Turning first to the event at Śrāvastī, we find two concerns of note. First is the basic setting for the day's events: a challenge by the Buddha's opponents, who were distressed that Śākyamuni's popularity was growing at their expense. This particular issue should be understood within the temporal context in which the contest took place. That is, the tīrthikas' challenge was levied towards the end of the hot season, in May or June. Soon thereafter the rains retreat would have begun; this was a period in which ś*ramaṇas,* Buddhist and non-Buddhist alike, were expected to enter fixed dwellings for three months. Some scholars, most notably Sukumar Dutt, have expressed the opinion that the

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[13] Rockhill. *Life of the Buddha,* 80-82.

gathering of individual communities in specific locales during the rains retreat was the chrysalis from which Buddhist monasticism came to full flower.[14] Although I did not explore Dutt's hypothesis in the chapter on Ajaṇṭā's Saṅgha, the argument I made therein obviates any simple acceptance of Dutt's proposition. The yearly gathering of monks could not have been the sole mechanism for the saṅgha's domestication; the inescapable obligation Buddhist monks were under to participate in a system of generalized exchange was, to recall Strenski's dictum, domestication itself. In short, I would suggest that one important sub-text to the magic contest at Śrāvastī was the issue of patronage and social integration. At stake in this display of power was the issue of which ascetic teacher could claim supremacy on earth; which would be able to gain the highest social standing for his order at the time of maximum contact between monks, lay supporters, and potential lay supporters. As the Buddha reflected before performing a miracle in the harem of Kapilavastu, the display of thaumaturgic "power is a way to win over common people quickly."[15] In its fundamental conception, the Śrāvastī miracle had less to do with the Buddha's superior wisdom or the quality of the doctrines and practices he taught, than with a matter of sheer power, and by extension the social benefits resulting from superior power. The Buddha's success in Śrāvastī demonstrated that, in a cycle of generalized exchange, the saṅgha with the Buddha at its head would have had the highest 'potential energy,' the greatest spiritual efficacy.

A religious leader that could so drive so powerful a figure as Pūraṇa-Kāśyapa to lunacy and suicide could surely keep a demoness like Hārītī at bay. In fact, the scope of

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[14] Sukumar Dutt. *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries of India.* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988): 53ff.

[15] *asty āśu pṛthagjanasya riddhir āvarjanakarī;* Raniero Gnoli (ed). *The Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabhedavastu, Being the 17th and last Section of the Vinaya of the Mūlasarvāstivādin.* (Rome: Instituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1977): part 2, 37.

the Buddha's accomplishment in Śrāvastī is signaled by the terminology used to describe his 'miracle:' "the Buddha displayed a miracle of power in regard to the highest human state."[16] Nothing in the human world is beyond the power of a being who could perform this act. Here we begin to enter into the Buddhological tensions that I am most concerned to explore within this chapter. We commonly call the performance at Śrāvastī a "miracle." But this term is a translation of the Sanskrit *ṛddhiprātihārya*, and in fact, is only one of three *prātihāryas*. According to the *Abhidharmakośa* (verse 7.47), the other two are the *prātihārya* of knowing others' thoughts and the *prātihārya* of teaching.[17] In this context, *prātihārya* less means "miracle" or "extraordinary occurrence" as suggested by Edgerton,[18] than a "means of conversion." This latter definition tallies with Vasubandhu's etymological explanation of the term: "These [three] are *prātihāryas* because, from the first and with great force, they carry away (*har*) the minds of those to be trained; *pra* and *ati* signify initial action and intensity [respectively]."[19]

The question remains, however, whether the display of the Buddha's thaumaturgic powers at Śrāvastī for the purpose of immediately and forcibly captivating the minds of his audience was a trick. Were these conjured Buddhas, produced through the power of Śākyamuni's mind, *merely* fictive illusions? Or was the event in Śrāvastī a "miracle" in the Humean sense, a transgression of the natural order? In Lamotte's terms, was the Buddha at

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[16] *vidarśitaṃ bhagavatā uttare manuṣyadharme ṛddhiprātihāryaṃ* Cowell and Neil. *Divyāvadāna,* 163.

[17] *ṛddhicetaḥparyāyāsravakṣayābhijñās trīṇi prātihāryāṇi yathākramam ṛddyādeśanānuśāsanaprātihāryāṇi* | Vasubandhu. *Abhidharmakośa & Bhāṣya of Ācārya Vasubandhu with Sputārthā Commentary of Ācārya Yaśomitra.* Ed. by Dwarika Das Shastri. (Varanasi: Bauddha Bharati, 1987): 1114.

[18] Franklin Edgerton. *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar and Dictionary.* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1985): vol. 2, 392a, s.v. *prātihārya.*

[19] *vineyamanasām ādito 'tyarthaṃ haraṇāt pratihāryāṇi; prātiśabdayor ādikarmabhṛśārthatvāt* | Vasubandhu. *Abhidharmakośa,* 1114.

Śrāvastī a 'rational' or 'supermundane' Buddha? The *Divyāvadāna's* phrase, wherein the Buddha's *ṛddhiprātihārya* is called the highest human state (*uttara-manuṣyadharma*),[20] plays into Lamotte's 'rationalist' Buddhology, for which the Buddha stands at the furthest edge of, but within, the envelope of human being. Upon further reflection, however, the Buddha's performance at Śrāvastī seems to blur the line between his status as a mundane being, subject to the limits of what is *dharmatā*, and as supermundane being beyond all such laws.

One will recall that according to the *Sampasādaniya Sutta* cited above there may be only a single Buddha in any world system at any one time. In fact, Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośa* (verse 3.95) cites this very passage (in its Sanskrit version of course) as a canonical authority for the doctrine that "it is unprecedented and impossible for two Tathāgatas, Arhats, Full and Perfect Buddhas to arise in the world where [one] does not precede and [the other] does not follow. This cannot happen!"[21] Yet at Śrāvastī the Buddha demonstrated that two Buddhas *could* co-exist simultaneously. And not merely two Buddhas, one on top of the other: Śākyamuni conjured such a mass of Buddhas that the universe appeared to be filled in its entirety all of whom acted, spoke, and taught as if each was himself the 'real' and original magician.

The following might count as a rational apologist's explanation: there was ever only one Buddha, the remainder were merely conjured replications, without any individual ontological reality. Here we see the point of divisions between the 'rational' and 'supermundane' Buddhologies: for the latter, the single Buddha we know is neither more

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[20] The translation of *dharma* here is problematic, as it can signify anything from duty, to custom, to law, to essential quality. I have chosen to interpret *dharma* here as "life" or "state of existence," parallel to its use in the phrase *dṛṣṭadharma*. Cf. Edgerton. *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary,* 269a, s.v. *dṛṣṭa-dharma.*

[21] *asthānam anavakāśo yad apūrvācaramau dvau tathāgatāv arhatau samyaksaṃbuddhau loka utpadyeyātām ! nedaṃ sthānaṃ vidyate* | Vasubandhu. *Abhidharmakośa*, 550.

nor less fabulous than any one of the mass of Buddhas displayed at Śrāvastī. But, let us leave aside this point for the moment. More interesting yet is to find that the *Divyāvadāna* takes care to describe and treat these conjured Buddhas as if each were real according the 'rationalist' paradigm. According to the *Divyāvadāna* the conjured Buddhas adopt all four bodily attitudes (walking, standing, sitting, and lying), they enter the fire-element (i.e., they glow or shoot out fire), and they teach by asking and answering questions. Each, for the duration of its existence, appears to be animate and alive, performing the duties of a Buddha.

A tale told by the Tibetan historian Tāranātha shows that according to some Buddhist ideological traditions the three species of activity performed by the Śrāvastī's conjured Buddhas conformed to a specific set of criteria through which the 'real' Buddha was separated from facsimiles, such as sculptures. Tāranātha's narrative concerns an image of Buddha magically created in Bodh Gayā some one hundred years after the Buddha's nirvāṇa. At this time, according to Tāranātha, a brāhmaṇa named Kalyāṇa built a temple at Bodh Gayā, and accompanied by celestial artists, began to make a precise image of the Buddha. Nobody was allowed to enter the temple for seven days until the image was finished. On the sixth day, however, Kalyāṇa's mother entered. She explained that she alone among the living had seen Śākyamuni face to face, and therefore was the sole legitimator of the image's likeness, however because she was bound to die that very night she could not wait until the next morning. Tāranātha writes that Kalyāṇa's mother's "close examination of the image showed overall likeness with the Teacher. However there were discrepancies in three aspects. These were: no halo radiated from it, it was not preaching the Doctrine and, except for sitting, it did not show the three other attitudes. That is why it is [generally] said that this image resembled the real Buddha."[22] Needless to say, given

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[22] Tāranātha. *Tāranātha's History of Buddhism in India*. Ed. and trans. by Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1990): 42-3.

Tāranātha's separation from Ajaṇṭā, and indeed India, this example must be taken with an appropriately large dash of seasoning. Still, the point should be clear, at least by the traditional criteria reflected in Tāranātha's account, the Buddhas conjured by Śākyamuni at Śrāvastī not only "resembled the real Buddha," but were physically equivalent to that Buddha in every significant way.

Indeed, the irony in the event at Śrāvastī, when considered from the perspective of a 'rationalist' Buddhology is that the Buddha's performance cannot be thought of simply as a magic-trick, a display of the power in the highest *human* state. If, for the duration of the display, all the mass of Buddhas perform the same actions and have the same soteriological effect, then this is not merely a display, but truly a miracle wherein a law of nature, the *dharmatā* holding that only a single Buddha may exist in a single world system at any one time, is contravened. The epitome of the 'rational' Buddha acting within his own constraints therefore gives rise to a canon associated with the 'supermundane' Buddha, who is never subject to the constraints of the world of becoming.

Lamotte noted that this latter Buddhological paradigm was taken over by the Mahāyānists. And we find the paradoxes implicit in the Śrāvastī miracle's symbolisms played out in the adoption of this event's iconology within Mahāyānist literature. One simple and eloquent expression thereof, the *Bhadracarī* prayer at the end of the *Buddhāvataṃsaka Sūtra,* captures this cosmological vision in a single verse:

> I realize that in a single grain of dust are Buddhas like [in number] to dust seated in the midst of their sons, and that the entire universe is thus entirely filled with Buddhas.[23]

Far more grandly, however, is a display of the Buddha emanations found in the *Lotus Sūtra's* eleventh chapter. In this scene, Śākyamuni assembles emanations of his own body

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[23] *ekarajāgri rajopamabuddhāṃ / buddhasutāna niṣaṇṇaku madhye* {|} *evam aśeṣata dhamatadhātuṃ sarva / 'dhimucyami pūrṇa jinebhiḥ* {||} Shindo Shirashi. "Bhadracarī. Ein Sanskrittext des heiligen Jiun. Abdruck im Jare 1783," *Memoires of the Faculty of Liberal Arts & Education.* 13 (1962): 2.

from throughout the cosmos, all of which are acting and working within their own realms as independent Buddhas, saving beings:

> [Śākyamuni Buddha said,] 'The Buddhas who are emanations of my body, who in the world-spheres of the ten directions preach Dharma, are now to gather."
>
> At that time, the Buddha emitted a single glow from his white hair-tuft, by which straightaway were seen Buddhas of lands in the eastern quarter equal in number to the sands of five hundred myriads of millions of nayutas of Ganges rivers. . . . The Buddhas of those lands preached the dharmas with a great, subtle sound. . . . To the south, the west, the north, to the four intermediate directions as well as upward and downward, wherever the glow of the white hair-tuft reached, it was also thus.
>
> At that time, the Buddhas in the ten direction all addressed their multitudes of bodhisattvas, saying "Good men! We are now to go to the Sahā world-sphere, to the place of Śākyamunibuddha. . . .
>
> In this way, by turns the [lands of the] thousand-millionfold world were filled, and still there was no limit to the emanations of Śākyamunibuddha in even one quarter. . . . . In the four hundred myriads of millions of nayutas of lands in every quarter, the Buddhas, the Thus Come Ones, filled every direction.[24]

So far my meditation on the Buddha's performance at Śrāvastī has considered two basic points. First, this miracle had a clear social agenda. The contest between the Buddha and tīrthika leaders took place directly before the beginning of the rains retreat. The Buddha's success can be viewed as a symbolic means for establishing the saṅgha as a desirable participant in a social system of generalized exchange; the very need for this contest attests to the fact that prior to the Buddha's miracle this position was not assured. Second, we found that the Buddha's performance was so very miraculous because it used the 'rationalist' symbolism of Buddha as super-Man as a foil against which to present the Buddha as supermundane-Man. In short, socially as well as religiously, the event at Śrāvastī is very much connected beginnings and their ambiguities.

The *devatāvataraṇa*, descent from the gods, at Sāṃkāśya takes place three months after the events at Śrāvastī, at the conclusion of the rains retreat. By contrast with Śrāvastī's

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[24] Leon Hurvitz (trans). *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma (The Lotus Sūtra).* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976): 185-7.

symbolisms of community formation, the details told of this latter event show it to have been understood as a time in which the hierarchy of individuals and segments internal to Buddhist saṅgha was clarified. As I began my discussion of the significance of the Śrāvastī miracle by making appeal to its temporal context within the Buddhist liturgical year, let me take that as my point of departure here as well.

If the display of a miracle at Śrāvastī enabled the Buddhists to gain converts and claim spiritual priority over their religious competitors, by the end of the rains retreat local monks and lay donors would naturally have developed a social accommodation with one another and formed a local Buddhist society. The earlier chapter on saṅgha explored this relationship in some depth. Here I supplement that discussion by drawing attention to a particularly important ritual through which that relationship was expressed and defined, and which took place upon the end of the rains: the ceremony of the *Kaṭhina*-robe. In brief, at the end of the rains retreat, the laity presented monks residing in their local monasteries with a new robe called the *Kaṭhina*. As one modern scholar writes, "the [*Kaṭhina*] ceremony symbolized the culminating point of the [laity's] hospitality towards the monks during the rainy season."[25]

Unfortunately, vinaya texts do not elaborate many details concerning the social significance of the *Kaṭhina*-robe or the ceremony in which it is given, and so I will turn to Melford Spiro's discussion of this event in modern Burma. Spiro distinguishes between lay and monastic interests in the *Kaṭhina*. For the monks, the *Kaṭhina*-robe is a badge of spiritual purity, presented only to monks who have respected the rules attendant upon the rains retreat, especially those regulations which restrict movement within a set *sīmā* during the rains. That is to say, only monks who were scrupulous about remaining within the

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[25] Mohan Wijayaratna. *Buddhist Monastic Life, According to the Texts of the Theravāda Tradition*. Trans. by Claude Grangier and Steven Collins. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990): 39.

local Buddhist community during the rainy period receive a *Kaṭhina* from that community's lay members. "From the standpoint of the monk," according to Spiro, this badge of monastic purity is "the most important [robe], not only because by custom it is accompanied by many other offerings, but because by ecclesiastical law it confers many privileges upon him."[26] Lacking a *Kaṭhina* robe Burmese monks are greatly restricted in their access to the laity during the remainder of the year. Similarly, "the Burmese [laity] believe that special merit attaches to the offering of a *kaheting* [(=*Kaṭhina*)]."[27] This merit is of two sorts: 1) the spiritual boons generous donors will enjoy in future lives and 2) because donors put the gifts on public display prior to the ceremony, the generous obtain the this-worldly merit of celebrity and prestige. The following story from the MSV's Ś*ayanāsana-vastu* confirms, at least circumstantially, the importance of the robes as emblematic of the ceremonial and meritorious relationship between Buddhist monks and laity:

> The Blessed One said that gifts should be given in the name of the deceased *dānapatis* of the past. An elder of the saṅgha recites a verse for the benefit of deceased *dānapatis* of the past. A certain householder came to the monastery, and heard this. The [elder] gave a gift. The [householder] went to [the elder] and said, "Ārya, if I have a vihāra erected, will you give a gift in my name as well?" [The elder] replied, "It is well. Have it built. I will give." Whereupon, that householder had a vihāra erected. Nothing at all was offered by him there. The [vihāra] remained completely empty. When the householder saw this, he came to the vihāra and said, 'Ārya, my vihāra stands empty, no *bhikṣu* at all dwells there.' The elder of the saṅgha replied, "Dear friend, It must be sweated out." The householder said, "Ārya, it was erected in a saline soiled jungle. How can it be sweated out?" [The elder]: "Householder, I am not speaking esoterically.[28] Rather, there is no

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[26] Melford E. Spiro. *Buddhism and Society: A Great Tradition and its Burmese Vicissitudes.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982): 301.

[27] Spiro. *Buddhism and Society,* 226.

[28] An interesting play is going on here. We have no technical manuals for the construction of monasteries dating back to Ajaṇṭā's day. In fact, our only source on this matter, the *Vāstuvidyāśāstra*, comes from Sri Lanka and should probably be dated several centuries after Ajaṇṭā's abandonment. Still, as the *Vāstuvidyāśāstra* is our only source, it is worth while to note that the text describes various of soils and terrains upon and within which monasteries were to be built. According to this text, *jaṅgala* ground should have fine sandy soil, not oily (E. W. Marasiṅghe (ed. and trans). *The Vāstuvidyāśāstra Ascribed*

> profit there." [The donor] replies, "Ārya, now I will clothe with a robe whoever dwells in my vihāra."[29]

The Buddha's descent from Sāṃkāśya, punctuated in later Buddhist liturgy by the ceremony of the *Kaṭhina*, not only provides an occasion for defining the proper relationship between the monk and lay-person. It also seems to have been understood as the moment at which the saṅgha's internal hierarchy was defined. To explain how I arrive at this thesis, let me recall with what might have seemed an odd and minor point in Rockhill's summary of the tale. Namely, that the Bhikṣuṇī Utpalavarṇā transformed herself into a Cakravartin, whereby she would have held the highest rank among those present and would be the first to greet Śākyamuni descending from heaven. Utpalavarṇā's involvement in this scene is truly fascinating, and, to my knowledge, has not received any serious study. In fact this detail is not unique to the MSV. It was shared in common by almost all accounts of the *devatāvatarana*, and as one see finds Fig. 74 was part of the story as know to Ajaṇṭā's artists as well: the beardless king riding the elephant at the

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to Mañjuśrī. [Delhi: Sri Satguru, 1989]: 9). It would seem, therefore, that this donor believes monks are staying away from his vihāra because they desire to respect propriety, to not inhabit a place built according to improper specifications. As we see, such canonical niceties were far from this elder's mind. Unfortunately, this pun does not work so well in translation, where the double-entendre cannot be maintained. I would guess that the elder's reply, "It must be sweated out (*utsvedya*)," could be idiomatically rendered into English, "The wheels must be greased."

[29] *uktaṃ bhagavatā: abhyatītakālagatānāṃ dānapatīnām nāmnā dakṣiṇā ādeṣṭavyā iti; saṃghastaviro 'bhyatītakālagatānāṃ dānapatinām arthāya gāthāṃ bhāṣate; anyatamaś ca gṛhapatir vihāram āgataḥ; tenāsau śrutaḥ dakṣiṇām ādiśat; satasya sakāśam upasaṃkrāntaḥ kathayati: ārya yady ahaṃ vihāraṃ kārayāmi mamāpi nāmnā dakṣiṇām uddiśasi iti; sa kathayati: kāraya suṣṭv ādiśāmi iti; yāvat tena gṛhapatinā vihāra kāritaḥ; tatrānena na kiṃcid dattaṃ; sa śūnya evāvasthitaḥ; yāvat tena gṛhapatinā dṛṣṭaḥ; sa vihāram āgamya kathayati: ārya madīyo vihāraḥ śūnya avasthitaḥ; na tatra kaścid bhikṣuḥ prativasati iti; saṃghasthaviraḥ kathayati: bhadramukha utsvedyaḥ; sa gṛhapatiḥ kathayati: ārya ūṣare jaṃgle kāritaḥ, kathaṃ utsvedyo bhavati? gṛhapate nāham etat saṃdhāya kathayāmi api tu tatra lābho nāsti iti; sa kathayati: ārya idānīṃ yo madīye vihāre prativasati tam ahaṃ paṭenācchādayāmi iti;* Raniero Gnoli (ed). *The Gilgit Manuscript of the Śayanāsanavastu and the Adhikaraṇavastu, Being the 15th and 16th Sections of the Vinaya of the Mūlasarvāstivādin*. (Rome: Instituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1978): 37.

Buddha's proper left is doubtless Utpalavarṇā.

However, the significance of this *bhikṣuṇī's* transformation, and the assessment of her conduct, do differ from narration to narration. Fa-Hien's fifth century testimony is the most sympathetic. Here, Utpalavarṇā transforms herself into a Cakravartin and thereby gains honor before the assembly as "the foremost of all in doing reverence to him."[30] Fa-Hien's tale is the only in which Utpalavarṇā succeeds thus. The Khotanese *Book of Zambasta*, stands at antipodes to this account: Despite Utpalavarṇā's trickery, a male disciple, Subhūti, is the first to greet Śākyamuni. Moreover, *Zambasta* has the Buddha scourge Utpalavarṇā for her display of magical powers: "(You have the limited wisdom) of a woman, the unlimited wiles (and) deceptions, as little gratitude, compassion, as the dew on the tip of a blade of grass. You are inconstant, you are wretched, wherever you come from. In my Śāsana let it not happen that you become chief."[31] Hsüan-Tsang's narration tallies with that of *Zambasta*, albeit without the vitriol. Here too Utpalavarṇā is bested by Subhūti. In *Zambasta*, however, Subhūti seems to greet Buddha in the flesh; according to Hsüan-Tsang, Subhūti was first because he beheld the Buddha's *Dharmakāya* in meditation.[32] Hsüan-Tsang tallies directly with the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra's* account.[33] Further, as we have already seen, Utpalavarṇā was chastised at the end of the MSV's

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[30] Fa-Hien. *A Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms*. Trans. by James Legge. (New York: Dover, 1965): 49. In note 2 on this page, Legge admits his own puzzlement over the translation of this passage. Although Legge's text reads that the Buddha transformed Utpalavarṇā's form into that of a Cakravartin, we can, based upon all the other accounts, accept Legge's alternate interpretation, whereby Utpalavarṇā's transformation was effected through her own power.

[31] R. E. Emmerick (ed. and trans). *The Book of Zambasta*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1968): 365.

[32] Hsüan-Tsang. *Si-Yu Ki: Buddhist Records of the Western World, translated from the Chinese of Hiuen Tsiang (A.D. 629)*. Trans. by Samuel Beal. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1981): vol. 1, 204-5.

[33] Étienne Lamotte. *Le Traité de la Grande Vertu de Sagesse de Nāgārjuna (Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra)*. (Louvain: Peeters, 1981): vol. 2, 634-6.

narration. Fig. 75 shows two Cakravartins kneeling before Buddha after his descent. One might interpret one of these kings as Utpalavarṇā still in disguise receiving her reprimand. However, I would instead propose that these two figures represent Cave 17's royal donor and his deceased brother; this latter point is beyond the scope of our present discussion to explore. Finally, the Pāli tradition, as preserved in the commentary to the *Dhammapada*, contravenes these others, for it does not name Utpalavarṇā as one of the party who greet the Buddha, returning from the gods. Yet, even this text preserves a vestige of this same tradition. To wit, before the Buddha performs his miracle in Śrāvastī, Utpalavarṇā offers to act in his stead: she will transform herself into the form of a Cakravartin, and pay obeisance to the Buddha. The Buddha declines Utpalavarṇā's offer.[34]

Aside from the misogyny revealed in several of these texts, especially *Zambasta,* one crucial theme linking these accounts is the assumption or agreement that whoever was to greet Buddha first was his foremost disciple. *Zambasta* states this explicitly: "The monks, the nuns, all the laymen, all the laywomen then assembled in Rājagṛha. They made an agreement with one another: 'When the Buddha descends hither, whoever can worship him first, wherever this Śāsana may be, that assembly will be chief of all among us.'"[35] This text's continuing narration makes clear that Utpalavarṇā transformed herself into a Cakravartin out of a desire to win this contest, and not from any genuine reverence for the Buddha. Fa-Hien speaks of Utpalavarṇā as "foremost" because of her successful ploy: the assumption is the same as that in *Zambasta*, the results quite different. Even the Pāli apparently concurs in this event's significance. According to the *Dhammapada* commentary, Śāriputra was the first to greet Śākyamuni, and the Buddha's first action after

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[34] Charles R. Lanman (trans). *Buddhist Legends.* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1921): vol. 3, 44. Within the Theravāda tradition, the commentary to the *Sutta Nipāta* claims that, upon the Buddha's descent, Utpalavarṇā paid homage to the Buddha second, immediately after Śāriputra (Lamotte. *Le Traité*, vol. 2, 634, n. 1).

[35] Emmerick. *Book of Zambasta,* 357.

his descent is to demonstrate to the assembly Śāriputra's supremacy of wisdom, second only to that of Buddha himself.[36] The *Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra* clarifies this point still further. In fact, this Mahāyānist text uses a discussion of the descent at Sāṃkāśya to elucidate Subhūti's preeminence over Śāriputra. For this *śāstra's* author, Subhūti was the disciple par excellence, since of all the Buddha's arhats, Subhūti was the one who had penetrated most deeply in the *Prajñāpāramitā*. Thus Subhūti was the first to greet Buddha; the Theravādins, of course, held Śāriputra as the foremost in wisdom, and name him as the Buddha's one-man welcome committee.

So far I have discussed how the Buddha's descent from Trāyastriṃśa heaven can be treated as a moment during which Buddhist social orders were expressed and set. Indeed, as members of the Buddhist community were struggling for position at the foot of the triple stair-case descending from Trāyastriṃśa, so the events on the stairs too were a graphic performance of the cosmological hierarchy. The symbolism is unambiguous and in need of little clarification. For three months in the heavens Buddha sat upon a throne while the many gods sat on the ground at his feet. And as the terrestrial relationships established during the rains retreat culminated in the *Kaṭhina* ceremony, so the Buddha's relationship with divine beings came to its fullest expression in this act of descent. But whereas human lay donors have only simple goods to offer, the gods' most precious possession is their own status as gods, and their gift was acclaiming Buddha as chief among them. There at Sāṃkāśya the Buddha displayed to all the world that he was, in the words of Ajaṇṭā's Varāhadeva, the immortal of immortals (app. A, No. 98, verse 1), or as this is more typically phrased, the *devātideva*, the god over other gods.

Within Buddhist cosmology, of course, divine realms are part of saṃsāra, as mundane as the human. So how can one understand the Buddha's descent in the terms I

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[36] Lanman. *Buddhist Legends,* vol. 3, 54-6.

borrowed from Lamotte? For the 'rationalist,' the Buddha is of the world and in the world; the 'supermundane' Buddha is not of the world yet he may be in it. Above we found a tension between these Buddhologies at Śrāvastī, where the Buddha's miracle gained ideological force by blurring boundaries: the Buddha most definitely was in the world, but his miracle left us uncertain as to whether he so far transcended the limits of cosmological propriety, *dharmatā*, as to show that he was not of it. At Sāṃkāśya, a much more troubling tension is expressed and resolved. Namely, what would it mean for the Buddha to be *not* in the world? More significantly, given the Śrāvastī miracle, what would it mean for a Buddha who might not even be of the world to be absent from the world? Twice removed from the world, would that Buddha ever return?

Having successfully demonstrated absolute terrestrial superiority, the Buddha disappeared from Śrāvastī without warning and with no indication of his destination or possible return. There was no Schwarteneggarian promise, "I'll be back." In fact, according to Fa-Hien, after the Buddha disappeared, he deliberately rendered himself invisible to his disciples and hid himself in heaven until the last week of the rainy season's third month.[37] Whereas the Buddha's disappearance from Śrāvastī was rather more unexpected than was his final nirvāṇa, one can draw an obvious parallel between the two events. As John Strong, one of the few scholars to have written on the event at Sāṃkāśya, suggests, the rising of Buddha to heaven and his subsequent descent "is a sort of mythological dry run for the Buddha's disappearance at parinirvāṇa and his reappearances thereafter."[38] This parallel with the Buddha's nirvāṇa is useful, since Buddhists were very concerned about that event and lavished many words upon it. However, when it comes to knowing whether the absent Buddha who returns was the 'rational' or 'supermundane' Buddha, we

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[37] Fa-Hien. *A Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms,* 48.

[38] John S. Strong. *The Legend and Cult of Upagupta.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992): 152.

find the authorities diverge.

According to a 'rational' Buddhology like that of the Theravādins, the answer is moot. The Buddha's absence is a state about which he refused to comment. As the Buddha told the monk Māluṅkyāputta in an eponymous *sutta* from the Pāli canon: "Understand as not explained what has not been explained by me. And what, Māluṅkyāputta, has not been explained by me? . . . That after dying the Tathāgata is . . . is not . . . both is and is not . . . neither is not is not."[39] This *sutta* ranks highly within the canon of Buddhist sources used by Western scholars, and as every student learns, the Buddha refused to answer Māluṅkyāputta's queries because their answers would not aid him on the path to his own nirvāṇa. Māluṅkyāputta's incessant questions might be likened to the anxiety of the Buddha's disciples, who, worried at the Buddha's absence, implored Mahāmaudgalyāyana to locate him. The answer Māluṅkyāputta never received may be likened, then, to Maudgalyāyana's report that Buddha had not left the mundane sphere altogether, but instead was dwelling in Trāyastriṃśa heaven among the gods. Just as the Buddha declares that a direct answer would not have benefitted Māluṅkyāputta, so even with Maudgalyāyana's intelligence the tensions occasioned by the absent Buddha were not resolved. Mahāmaudgalyāyana assured the disciples that Śākyamuni was still present in the world, despite his physical absence. However, for those lacking Maudgalyāyana's powers, and therefore having no direct access to the Buddha, this was hardly comforting news. According to the *Book of Zambasta*, for instance, King Udayana of Kosala had "extraordinary, very fiercely bitter anxiety;"[40] Udayana was so worried that he might die of a broken heart before Śākyamuni's return that he commissioned the first Buddha image to

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[39] I. B. Horner (trans). *The Collection of the Middle Length Sayings (Majjhima-Nikāya).* (London: Pāli Text Society, 1987): vol. 2, 101.

[40] Emmerick. *Book of Zambasta*, 347.

be made at this time.[41] This King of Kosala may have been an extreme case. Yet, even for the 'rational' Buddha paradigm, the descent at Sāṃkāśya's symbolism remains powerful because it offers the possibility that absent Buddhas do return; even if the Buddha is not of the world, he may yet come again to the world.

Just as the possibility of nirvāṇa is the Third Noble Truth of the standard Buddhist formula, the possibility of an absent Buddha's return can be likened to the Third Noble Truth of an alternate formula for devotional Buddhism, wherein the First Noble Truth would be the *duḥkha* of separation, the Second, the cause of this pain, e.g., nirvāṇa or ascent to heaven, and the Fourth, the means for recovering the Buddha such as image making &c. In fact, according to Hsüan-Tsang, after the Buddha descended, Udayana's image stood and gave its seat over to Śākyamuni, who charged the image with continuing his work after his real Mahāparinirvāṇa. Here, as in the miracle at Śrāvastī, Śākyamuni's personal identity is subordinated to his status and soteriological function as a Buddha, one of many. In short, the descent at Sāṃkāśya expresses a Buddha who may or may not be of the world, yet enters into and participates in the world. This re-entry of the Buddha into the lives of his disciples is a definitive moment, at which a social cosmos that had lost its linchpin is formed anew: the physical location of individuals and groups in this tableau at Sāṃkāśya defines their proper positions within the Buddhist social hierarchy.

The preceding paragraphs considered what it might mean for the Buddha to descend from heaven, or return from nirvāṇa, under a rationalist Buddhology. The answer is: we don't know how Buddhas work, just be glad he's back! According to a 'supermundane' Buddhological paradigm, however, such a descent is the Buddha's action *par excellence*. For this paradigm, every terrestrial action of a Buddha is mere display

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[41] Emmerick. *Book of Zambasta*, 343ff. Hsüan-Tsang (*Si-Yu Ki*, vol. 1, 235-36) concurs. See Emmerick's summary of the story on page 343 for further references to the story of King Udayana and the first Buddha image.

carried out by a conjured (*nirmita*) Buddha, ontologically equivalent to the myriad of alternate Buddhas conjured for the great performance at Śrāvastī. Thus the descent at Sāṃkāśya, where, from the common person's perspective, the Buddha comes in great pomp seemingly out of nowhere, is an allegory for the Buddha's every action, which, in essence, come out of nowhere.

Although this docetic Buddhology is not strictly Mahāyānist, above I did call attention to Lamotte's observation that the 'supermundane' Buddha was fully a standard doctrine for the Mahāyāna. Similarly, there is a type of nirvāṇa that is specifically associated with the Mahāyāna, and for which the descent at Sāṃkāśya is also emblematic. This state of liberation is called *apratiṣṭhita-nirvāṇa*. Edgerton defines *apratiṣṭhita* as "not permanently fixed," and explains that this is "the Mahāyānistic nirvāṇa in which the Tathāgata returns to worldly life to save creatures, tho remaining incapable of personal involvement in it."[42] In the case of Sāṃkāśya, of course, the Buddha returns not only to save creatures, but also to continue his 'ministry' and regulate his community. In an excellent study of the *apratiṣṭhita-nirvāṇa* doctrine, Gadjin Nagao provides wealth of citations from Buddhist literature, which show that for the Mahāyāna, just because a Buddha (or bodhisattva) has achieved nirvāṇa does not mean he is irrevocably and for all time fixed in that state.[43] But none of Nagao's citations describe this doctrine, in both its technical and emotional dimensions, as well as these two verses from Buddhabhadra's inscription on Cave 26:

> [The Tathāgata] has definitively conquered death &c., has won the state free of old-age and death, and has departed for the City of Tranquility --- which is blissful [and] free, [but] without a fixed location -- and yet accomplished the aims of living beings. That is why extolling [his] qualities is efficacious, [yielding] extensive and great advantage, and [why even] a single flower

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[42] Edgerton. *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary*, 48a, s.v. *a-pratiṣṭita*.

[43] Gadjin Nagao. "The Bodhisattva Returns to this World," *Mādhyamika and Yogācāra*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991): 23-34.

> offered to him is a primary cause for the fruits known as heaven and final emancipation.

Śrāvastī and Sāṃkāśya are linked events which demonstrate, first the absolute supermundane range of a Buddha's power, and second that Buddhahood's perfection and liberation do not necessarily preclude the Buddha's personal accessibility. Above I used a passage from the *Lotus Sūtra* to show how an iconology associated with the miracle at Śrāvastī was appropriated by a Mahāyāna author. Whereas I have found no similar iconological parallel for the descent at Sāṃkāśya, the *Lotus*' tale concerning Prabhūtaratna, a Buddha who had entered complete and full nirvāṇa aeons in the past, can be taken as Sāṃkāśya's ideological parallel. According to the *Lotus,* "in the distant past . . . there was a Buddha called Many Jewels (Prabhūtaratna). Earlier . . . [that Buddha] took a great vow: 'If I achieve Buddhahood, and if, after my passage into extinction . . . there is a place in which the Scripture of the Dharma Blossom is preached . . . may my stūpa-shrine well up before it and bear witness."[44] In point of fact, Prabhūtaratna's stūpa contains his entire body in pristine form. And as an addendum to this vow, Prabhūtaratna also pledged that another Buddha could only show Prabhūtaratna's body within the stūpa to an assembly if and only if that Buddha were to gather all the emanations of his body into one place. The precondition for Prabhūtaratna's 'descent' from *mahāparinirvāṇa* to the mundane world is the display of a Śrāvastī-like miracle, demonstrating the universal scope, the unity and diversity, of Buddhahood. And just as the descent at Sāṃkāśya is a crucial event in the common biography of all Buddhas, so the meeting of Śākyamuni and Prabhūtaratna was a crucial moment in Mahāyānist mythology. In fact, one of the few distinct iconographic references to Mahāyāna textual traditions at Ajaṇṭā may be an intrusive image of these two Buddhas teaching, seated side by side, carved in Cave 26's caitya arch (Fig. 76). This carving's standing bodhisattvas are a common framing technique, functioning as indices of

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[44] Hurvitz. *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom*, 184.

both sacrality and narrative closure.

The King is Dead, Long Live King Buddha

I introduced the preceding meditation upon the events at Śrāvastī and Sāṃkāśya with the claim that the Buddha at Ajaṇṭā may be understood, at least in part, through the symbolic associations attached to these paired performances. Through the following investigation we found that Lamotte's differentiation between 'rational' and 'supermundane' Buddhologies has a degree of value for the precise dissection of Buddhahood. But we also found that such philosophical niceties may not have been not very important on the ground. The narrative cycle of the Buddha's multiplication, his defeat of the *tīrthikas*, his disappearance, and his reappearance flanked by gods all reveal a single basic interest in the Buddha that is not easily delimited by such categories of explanation. Namely, one finds that this cycle shows Buddhists' desire to have their Buddha present and powerful. Perhaps more important yet, the descent expresses anxieties about the absent Buddha, and confirms that absent Buddhas can and do return: this return not only brings the Buddha back to his saṅgha, but also serves is a definitive moment in which the saṅgha, lay followers, and the cosmos at large is reconstituted with every person and group in its proper place.

Although the above exploration of Śrāvastī and Sāṃkāśya can assist in the recovery of Ajaṇṭā's Buddha there is still a distance to travel. The question remains of how these symbolic associations were manifest at Ajaṇṭā in particular. Let us begin this chapter's final third, therefore, with a suite of verses from Ajaṇṭā's programmatic donative inscriptions. First, a verse from Varāhadeva's Cave 16 inscription (verse 29):

> This cave-[monastery] . . ., which people -- their affection inflamed with joy and faith -- call [Śrī] Vaijayanta, was made in order to share in the felicities piled high in the brilliance of Indra's crown.

Second we read in the Cave 17 inscription (verse 9):

> [These] princes were the very image of Pradyumna and Sāmba. . . . The Elder *avatāra* bore sovereignty alone, the second the name Ravisāmba.

The third verse comes from Cave 26 and Buddhabhadra (verse 5):

> Gods' victories are reversed, for they are subject to adversity: even Śiva became glassy-eyed due to a curse, and Kṛṣṇa, though independent of [others'] will, fell to the will of death. Thus triumph the Sugatas, absolutely free of fear.

This trio of verses from three distinct donors are linked in their suggestive portrayal the Buddha as simultaneously a god and as a warrior; I say 'suggestive' for we have to read between the lines. To understand the example from Cave 16 thus, one must know that Śrī Vaijayanta was the name given to Indra's palace in Trāyastriṃśa heaven. Earlier in his inscription Varāhadeva described his cave-monastery as the "splendid dwelling for the Lord of Ascetics" (verse 22). By using the name of Indra's home for that of the Buddha, Varāhadeva is making a clear homology between the two figures, a link strengthened by Varāhadeva's reference to the "statues of Indra's beauties" (verse 24) and the monastery's rivaling the splendor of Surendra's temples (verse 27). Complementing his role as the lord of heaven, Indra was of course revered for his prowess on the battlefield.

Whereas Indra was the divine king within the Vedic cosmology, *purāṇic* Hinduism is best known for its elevation of Viṣṇu and Śiva as supreme gods. The Cave 17 and Cave 26 verses utilize this more current mythological paradigm for their characterizations of the Buddha. In the verse from Cave 17, this royal donor and his brother are themselves equated with Pradyumna and Sāmba. These two figures were part of a group of five members belonging to Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa's immediate family. Originally deified as heroes and known for their ability as warriors, Pradyumna and Sāmba had, by the Gupta period, come to be considered supermundane manifestations of the supreme Vaiṣṇavite deity

within the theology of the Pāñcarātra sect.[45] The use of the term *'avatāra'* in Cave 17's verse makes clear that its author intended the double significance of hero and god be associated with this king and his brother. When the sovereign *avatāra,* who was Cave 17's donor, vowed to become a Lord of Sages himself (verse 28), he ideologically subverted Vaiṣṇava claims to cosmological and soteriological primacy, setting the Buddha as supreme among heros and gods. Finally, the verse from Cave 26 is the most explicit. In good scholastic fashion, Buddhabhadra is carefully thoroughgoing in his subordination of both Viṣṇu and Śiva to the Buddha, whose victories are assured and who always triumphs.

It goes without saying, however, that the association of royal symbolism with the figure of Buddha was by no means unique to these verses from Ajaṇṭā. In the *Book of Zambasta*, for instance, it was written that while Śākyamuni was in Trāyastriṃśa heaven "Jambudvīpa had become as when no Buddha has been here, just like . . . a land where there is no king."[46] I will return to this passage below, for as one will recall, according to Spink's reconstructed history, the realm of the Vatsagulma Vākāṭakas in which Ajaṇṭā was located had become a land without a king upon Hariṣeṇa's death. But whereas a mortal king cannot return from the beyond, we know a Buddha can. Before exploring this line of investigation, however, I wish to elaborate further upon the more general association of Buddha and sovereignty.

In the chapter on Dharma above, I cited a passage from the Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya which described Śuddhodana's reaction to seeing his son's retinue, comprised

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[45] For Ajaṇṭā, the significance of Pāñcarātra Vaiṣṇavism far exceeds the brief mention I make here. For an introduction to this religion's literature, theology and iconography see F. Otto Schrader. *Introduction to the Pāñcarātra and the Ahirbudhnya Saṃhitā* (Madras: Adyar Library and Research Center, 1916); Jan Gonda. *Viṣṇuism and Śivaism, A Comparison.* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1976): 48ff; Doris Srinivasan. "Early Vaiṣṇava Imagery: Caturvyūha and Variant Forms," *Archives of Asian Art* 32 (1979): 39-54; and T. S. Maxwell. *Viśvarūpa.* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988).

[46] Emmerick. *Book of Zambasta*, 347.

chiefly of misshapen and ugly fire-worshipper ascetics. Śuddhodana pressed the Śākyas of Kapilavastu about their consanguineous relationship to Sarvārthasiddha: "If prince Sarvārthasiddha were not to have renounced [household life], what would he have become?" They answer, "A Cakravartin king." "What would you have become," Śuddhodana further inquires. The reply comes, "Followers." Thus Śuddhodana bids the Śākyas to act as his son's followers by becoming attendants to the King of Dharma as his monks.[47] Indeed, in the same way that it is *dharmatā* for a Buddha to perform a great miracle and to descend at Sāṃkāśya before he can attain nirvāṇa, so it is *dharmatā* that a being like Prince Sarvārthasiddha, born with the 32 marks of a great man, must become either a Cakravartin King or, if he renounces household life, a Unexcelled, Full and Complete Buddha.[48] This cultural assumption can readily explain the Śākya's near unanimous acceptance of Sarvārthasiddha's/Śākyamuni's temporal and spiritual supremacy.

Charged by Śuddhodana with divining his prince's destiny, brāhmaṇas augured that Sarvārthasiddha would become either a Cakravartin or a Buddha. In a sense, those seers' distinction was a false one. In a sense, Śākyamuni became both a Buddha and a Cakravartin. Buddhist writings on Buddhahood and Cakravartin kingship often blur the distinction between the two, drawing parallels between them on two levels, in terms of physical attributes and in terms of their social and soteriological roles. As we have already seen, the physical consonance between the Buddha and Cakravartin is couched in terms of the 32 marks of a great man. This physical equivalence is explained in the *Abhidharmakośa* (verse 3.97): A Cakravartin king differs from others kings in that the Cakravartin, like a Buddha, possesses these 32 characteristics. Buddhas and Cakravartins

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[47] Gnoli. *Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabhedavastu*, vol. 1, 200.

[48] Gnoli. *Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabhedavastu*, vol. 1, 49; Waldschmidt. *Das Mahāvadāna*, part 2, 94-5.

are physically distinct, however, in that a Buddha's marks are more visibly placed and more brilliant than those of a Cakravartin.[49]

In addition to these morphological details shared by the Buddha and Cakravartin while alive, the two are equated physically in that their dead bodies are treated similarly as well. Within the *Mahāparinirvāṇa sūtra*, the Buddha holds that faithful brāhmaṇas and householders should worship of his corpse in a manner analogous to their worship for the body of a deceased Cakravartin king: the body is wrapped in successive layers of cloth; it is then placed in "an oil vessel of iron" which is placed within another such vessel; the body is burned on a pyre of scented wood; the bones are placed in a golden urn, lifted on a golden bier, and interred in a stūpa; finally, parasols, banners, and flags, are erected, the stūpa is carried in a great procession, and is honored, revered, esteemed, and worshipped with perfumes, garlands, flowers, incense, and music.[50] A second parallel is drawn between Śākyamuni as Buddha and Śākyamuni as Cakravartin when, in this same *sūtra*, Ānanda interrogates Śākyamuni as to why he chose Kuśinagara, an unknown back-water village, as the site for his *mahāparinirvāṇa*. Śākyamuni replies with a *jātaka* tale concerning his life as a Cakravartin named Mahāsudarśana: that wheel-turning king ruled from the grand city of Kuśāvatī, which was located in the same spot as the now poor

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[49] Vasubandhu. *Abhidharmakośa*, 553.

[50] Waldschmidt. *Das Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra. Text in Sanskrit und Tibetisch, verglichen mit dem Pāli nebst einer Übersetzung der chinesischen Entsprechung im Vinaya der Mūlasarvāstivādins.* 3 volumes. Abhandlungen der Deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaten zu Berlin. Philosophish-historische Klasse Jahrgan 1949 No. 1 / Jahrgang 1950 No. 2 / Jahrgang 1950 No. 3 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag 1950-51): 358, 360. For an English translation of the parallel passage from the Pāli see Davids. *Dialogues of the Buddha*, vol. 2, 154-56. Note, however that the Pāli and Sanskrit texts do differ. See also Gregory Schopen's essay "Monks and the Relic Cult in the Mahāparinibbānasutta: An Old Misunderstanding in Regard to Monastic Buddhism." In *From Benares to Beijing, Essays on Buddhism and Chinese Religion.* Ed. by Koichi Shinohara and Gregory Schopen. (Oakville: Mosaic Press, 1991): 187-201. In this article, Schopen treats this passage at some length, but ignores the differences between the Sanskrit and Pāli redactions although they would have important ramifications for his argument.

Kuśinagara. The importance of such physical equivalences between the figures of Buddha and Cakravartin are significant for recovering Ajaṇṭā's conception of the Buddha, since the most significant data at the site, numerically speaking, are the many iconographic representations of the Buddha's body.

According to the Buddhist "Genesis," the first king, the Mahāsaṃmata, of whom Sarvārthasiddha and Rāhula were direct lineal descendants, was elected for this honor because he was "the most handsome, the most attractive, the most pleasing, and the most eminent."[51] Within a karmic universe, physical beauty can be a direct index of spiritual merit and of social role. And thus as Buddhas and Cakravartins are virtually equal in terms of their physical attributes, so their Dharmas, their social and soteriological roles, are nearly parallel as well. To begin, both figures are described as turners of wheels: Buddhas turn the Wheel of Dharma (*dharmacakra*); Cakravartin kings, that of worldly power or state-craft (*ājñācakra*). The *Aṅguttara nikāya* of the Pāli canon enumerates five ways in which each rolls his respective wheel, citing the same five for both:

> Monks, endowed in five ways a rajah rolling the wheel (of state), rolls on the wheel by Dhamma, and that wheel may not be rolled back by the hand of any hostile son of man. In which five ways?
>
> Herein monks, the rajah, rolling the wheel of state, knows good, knows Dhamma; knows measure; knows times; and knows assembled men.
>
> Even so, monks, endowed in five ways, the Tathāgata, arahant, fully enlightened, rolls on by Dhamma the unsurpassed Dhamma wheel; and that which may not be rolled back by recluse, godly man, deva, Mava [*sic*], Brahma, or by any in the world. In which five ways?
>
> Herein monks, the Tathāgata . . . knows good, knows Dhamma, knows measure, knows times, and knows assembled men.[52]

Stanley Tambiah calls attention to the difference-in-unity of these two figures: the

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[51] *yo 'smākaṃ sattvo 'bhirūpataraś ca darśanīyataraś ca prāsādikataraś ca maheśākhyataraś ca taṃ vayaṃ kṣetrāṇām adhipatiṃ sthāpayema* Gnoli. *Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabhedavastu*, vol. 1, 15.

[52] Cited in Stanley J. Tambiah. *World Conqueror & World Renouncer: A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand against a Historical Background*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976): 44.

Cakravartin king's sphere of invincibility is restricted to human society; the Buddhas' laws are supreme over humans, social and extra-social, subhuman demons and superhuman gods, and even (to add Buddhabhadra's two-cents) Śiva and Kṛṣṇa. Tambiah calls further attention to the "simultaneously complementary and asymmetrical relationship" between Buddha and Cakravartin in a second passage of the Pāli *Aṅguttara nikāya*, where it is written that both are born to profit the world, both are extraordinary, both are worthy of a stūpa, yet only the Tathāgata is awakened.[53] Physically identical, the Buddha and Cakravartin differ in terms of the cosmological range of their comprehension and power. Rolling the wheel of Dharma, a Buddha establishes the ultimate, supermundane basis of the world's weal. Rolling the wheel of statecraft, a Cakravartin maintains and preserves the universal Dharma on the mundane plane.

Now before turning to Ajaṇṭā's evidence, there is still one more point to be made concerning the equivalence between the Cakravartin and Buddha. How can the differential identity between these two figures be accommodated to the Buddhology we have already explored at some length, i.e., the Buddha as a performer of great miracles and as a returner from the beyond?

The physical equivalences drawn between Buddha and Cakravartin fit into the conceptual space opened up by the Śrāvastī miracle. Not only is the multiplication of Buddhas as far as Akaniṣṭha heaven a *prima facie* expression of concern with the corporeal Buddha, but recall, the *Divyāvadāna* was careful to show that every conjured Buddha was physically indistinguishable from the 'original.' Now, the discourse surrounding the event at Śrāvastī places this ultimate expression of physicality within the context of a contest over power, spiritual and social, between the Buddha and his rivals. As the Buddha is known to be master of "the ultimate human state" through his bodily

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[53] Tambiah. *World Conqueror & World Renouncer*, 44-45.

display, so the Cakravartin king differs from other kings in his possession of the 32 marks. And as the Buddha vanquished the *tīrthikas* by acclaim, through force of his personal power without directly attacking against these enemies, so Cakravartins conquer lesser kings because those kings submit of their own volition. In Vasubandhu's words (verse 96): no Cakravartin is a killer; even [Cakravartins] who conquer through weapons never kill.[54] Accordingly, Cakravartins are properly said to be *Dharmiko Dharmarājas*: they maintain the political economy through the exercise of Dharma alone, without resorting to force of arms. Finally, an association can be made between the Śrāvastī miracle and the Buddha/Cakravartin homology on the social plane. I claimed that this event in Śrāvastī was symbolically important for Buddhism as a social institution because it legitimates the Buddhist saṅgha's affirmation as a group most deserving of lay alms and support. From the Buddhist perspective, a Cakravartin's reign creates a healthy environment in which the *bhikṣusaṅgha* may flourish, for his support of the monks is precisely what is meant by ruling through Dharma.

Turning to the descent at Sāṃkāśya, we saw that this event had two principle foci of concern: 1) the Buddha's absence and reappearance and 2) the maintenance of a unified and properly ordered saṅgha. The Buddha creates the *bhikṣusaṅgha*; the Cakravartin advances society by maintaining the purity and ranks of that order. Although Buddhist literature contains tales in which a Buddha and a Cakravartin co-exist, the Cakravartin ideal makes sense preeminently for a world in which the Buddha, having entered *mahāparinirvāṇa*, is no longer present. Given the acephalous nature of the Buddhist saṅgha, its lack of an intrinsic mechanism for determining orthodoxy or maintaining unity, and its historical tendency towards fission, only an extra-saṅghic

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[54] *sarve tu cakravartinaḥ*
avadhāḥ || 96 ||
śastreṇāpi jayatāṃ vadho na pravartate | Vasubandhu. *Abhidharmakośa*, 553.

individual possessed of appropriate authority could be invoked to ensure the order's perpetuation and purity after the Buddha's death. Ideally, this individual would possess characteristics as similar to those of a Buddha as possible without, however, relinquishing the necessary means and authority to rule effectively. Moreover, because the Cakravartin's Dharma is ultimately reliant upon that proclaimed by the Buddha, which the *bhikṣusaṅgha* perpetuates through its conduct and practice, the Cakravartin's support of the saṅgha requires him to take an active role in augmenting and purifying that body, both through the regulation of monastic orthodoxy and through proselytizing. This aspect of the Cakravartin's duties is the point at which he approaches closest to the Buddha in the social and soteriological roles symbolized through the descent at Sāṃkāśya.

Returning now to Ajaṇṭā, let us consider how this complex ideology of Buddha-hood I have explored was expressed. To begin, let us turn to the central image in Cave 16 (Fig. 23). We saw in the first chapter of my "prolegomena" that Spink considered Cave 16 "the crucial cave" because motival developments therein provide a model for the site's overall development. For my purposes, Cave 16 is crucial because its main image is the first to represent the Buddha in an iconographic form known as *bhadrāsana,* i.e., seated upon a royal throne, his legs pendant "European style" (also called *pralambapādāsana).* Although the *bhadrāsana* Buddha figure was used sporadically in the pre-Ajaṇṭā Buddhist art of the Kuṣāṇas as well as at Nāgārjunakoṇḍa, in these cases it was almost always used for depictions of the Buddha within biographical narratives rather than for free standing images that may have been the direct objects of individual worship. Similarly, Spink chronicles Buddhas painted in *bhadrāsana* as part of Ajaṇṭā's narrative murals as many as ten years before the realization of Cave 16's massive central image, which was the very first sculptural rendering of this iconographic form at Ajaṇṭā. In fact, according to Spink's reconstruction, Varāhadeva's original plans placed a Buddha seated in the cross-legged

lotus position, not *bhadrāsana,* in the central shrine; this plan was changed, however, in the wake of the hiatus of 472 and the massive disturbance it betokened. Varāhadeva's innovation soon became the rage. Most notably, the central figure sculpted on the Cave 26 *stūpa* was reconceived to incorporate this new position. Similarly, a majority of intrusive images painted and carved between 479 and 480 -- while the specter of civil war menaced following Hariṣeṇa's death -- represent the Buddha seated in the *bhadrāsana.*

Complementing Cave 16's (initially) unique iconography was this Buddha's unique placement within the cave and style. All other central Buddha figures within Ajaṇṭā's vihāras were carved in shrines and were set apart from their monasteries' principal space. In some vihāras, like Caves 11 and 22, the Buddha was placed within a separate chamber attached to the main pavilion; more typically the Buddha was twice removed, his chapel set behind a shrine-antechamber. By contrast, Cave 16's Buddha was separated from this vihāra's main space by only a pair of pillars. Thus, Spink describes Cave 16's as "a revolutionary new Buddha, authoritatively posed, and looming directly above the devotee, rather than set back within a conventional shrine."[55] And Sheila Weiner writes of this as "the most impressive and awesome of all"[56] Ajaṇṭā's shrine images; "compared with the other shrine images at Ajaṇṭā . . . there is a prepossessing and overbearing majesty to this figure that sets it apart conceptually."[57]

Why did Varāhadeva take the radical step of reconfiguring his entire shrine, both its Buddha and its architecture after the hiatus? Why did he chose the particular iconographic form of the *bhadrāsana*? Why did he set that Buddha so forcefully and majestically within the vihāra's principal living space? What was so evocative and resonant

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[55] Walter M. Spink. "A Scholar's Guide to the Ajanta Caves." Typescript.

[56] Sheila Weiner. *Ajaṇṭā: Its Place in Buddhist Art.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977): 69.

[57] Weiner. *Ajaṇṭā*, 98.

about the *bhadrāsana* Buddha that this figure became an iconographic norm at Ajaṇṭā so swiftly after Varāhadeva's introduction of it as a hieratic, free standing, cult-image? To answer these questions we must consider a pair of circumstances. First there is the figure's iconology: the symbolisms associated with the *bhadrāsana*. Second there are the historical circumstances and political developments at Ajaṇṭā itself which made this iconology particularly meaningful for the local community.

Turning to the *bhadrāsana's* iconologic significance, one finds that the majority of this chapter has, in fact, been devoted to precisely this topic. The chapter's first half explored certain symbolisms attached to the Buddha. More recently I have tried to show how the Buddha can be homologized to the figure of the Cakravartin king and how the Śrāvastī miracle and descent to Sāṃkāśya can be linked conceptually to this bi-figure. Now I would propose that the *bhadrāsana* itself embodies this multileveled symbolism. Above, in Lamotte's discussion of the *Logion of the Lotus,* we saw that the lotus, and by extension the cross-legged lotus position, symbolically embody the detachment and tranquility of an Awakened Buddha. This is why the Buddhological paradigms Lamotte extracted from this *logion* were found to be not very useful for analyzing the Buddha of Śrāvastī and Sāṃkāśya. By contrast, the *bhadrāsana* suggests the "abandonment of this detached attitude in favor of action and manifestation," in Dietrich Seckel's words.[58] In point of fact, this position is generally assumed by art historians to have been introduced to India through the tradition of Kuṣāṇa royal portraiture. As John Rosenfield writes, "This formal and hieratic pose . . . occurred only once to my knowledge in Indian art before the Kushan period, but thereafter played an important role, imbuing sacred images with a majesty and presence lacking in the rather compressed outline of the regular ascetic seated

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[58] Dietrich Seckel. *The Art of Buddhism.* Trans. by Ann E. Keep. (New York: Crown Publishers, 1964): 166.

pose."[59] In addition to this iconography's majestic presentation of the body, the accompanying details of such images also bespeak royalty: a lion throne with a wheel of law at its base,[60] attendants bearing chaurīs, the figure's feet on a raised pedestal (since a king's feet may not touch the ground[61]), and so on. Additionally, with two exceptions, Ajaṇṭā's *bhadrāsana* Buddhas are always portrayed with their hands in the *mudrā* of turning the Wheel of Law, an iconographic expression of supremacy shared (as we have seen) by Buddhas and Cakravartins. Indeed, Cave 16's donative inscription records Varāhadeva's awareness and explicit intention to exploit such regal associations for his central Buddha: Varāhadeva's vihāra was Śrī Vaijayanta itself, a splendid dwelling for an ascetic Indra (*yatīndra*).

Despite the spiritual majesty carried within the *bhadrāsana's* semantic field, this position was used for free standing cult figures only infrequently before Varāhadeva's innovation. In regard to Gandhāran art Rosenfield writes, "the European pose became fairly common, but it was reserved (with variations) entirely for princes, Bodhisattvas, and for minor deities -- never for the Buddha as a cult image until the third century and then only rarely."[62] Through the interaction of north and south during the Śātavāhana period, *bhadrāsana* Buddhas came to be sculpted in the monastic sites of Amarāvatī and Nāgārjunakoṇḍa. But, in these southern monasteries, as at Ajaṇṭā prior to Varāhadeva's

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[59] John M. Rosenfield. *The Dynastic Arts of the Kushans*. (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1993): 186.

[60] See Jeannine Auboyer's two works ("Un aspect du symbolisme de la souveraineté dans l'Inde d'après l'iconographie des trônes," *Revue des arts asiatiques*. XI [1937]: 88-101 and *Le Trône et son symbolisme dans l'Inde ancienne*. Annales de Musée Guimet, Bibl. d'étdudes 55. [Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1949]) for more complete renderings of the throne's symbolism.

[61] See Jan Gonda. *Ancient Indian Kingship from the Religious Point of View*. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966): 21.

[62] Rosenfield. *Dynastic Arts*, 186-87.

innovation, this particular iconography was used for representations of the Buddha as part of biographical scenes rather than for free-standing icons. Complementing the *bhadrāsana's* patent royal valences, this iconic form possessed a centuries-long heritage of use in narrative depictions of the Buddha; Ajaṇṭā's murals predating the Cave 16 sculpture made wide use of *bhadrāsana* for portraying the Buddha engaged in his day-to-day interactions with both disciples and opponents. Seckel has observed that within Buddhist iconography in general "a symbol that had its origin and proper place in one of the biographical scenes may acquire a broader significance, and isolated from the original narrative context, may be use anachronistically -- or rather transhistorically -- in contexts where it seems to be out of place."[63] The Buddha in *bhadrāsana* turns this principle on its head. Unlike the *bhūmisparśa* Buddha, for example, which always has a single, fixed, and in a sense trans-historical referent, the *bhadrāsana* was not associated with any single event but with a wide variety of narrative circumstances; for this very reason this iconography was particularly well suited to representations of Buddha in his capacity as a living participant in human history. When this iconography was used for a cult-image, as in the rear of Cave 16, the canon of the engaged and active Buddha, pursuing the world's weal though his diurnal turning of the Dharma-Wheel, was therein encoded. But the Buddha's majesty was there as well. Thus, taking this interpretation one step further, the royal associations native to the *bhadrāsana* form itself may also be introduced within this web of signification, giving us the image of a Buddha who is not only operative in the world, but acting therein as a king, or rather, a Cakravartin. Here we reach the point at which theoretical musings concerning the *bhadrāsana* Buddha's nature may be linked to a consideration of the actual historical circumstances under which that iconographic form

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[63] Dietrich Seckel. "Early Buddha Symbols." In *The Image of the Buddha*. Ed. by David L. Snellgrove. (New York: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 1978): 28.

was introduced and adopted.

Despite the commanding potency of Cave 16's Buddha, one cannot presume that Varāhadeva's innovation in and of itself had the power to transform Buddhist iconography at Ajaṇṭā. To complete the picture, this sculpture's appeal to a conception of the Buddha deriving from far earlier strata of the Buddhist tradition should be understood in light of the political and historical events contemporary with its innovation at Ajaṇṭā. As I noted above, Spink proposes that Cave 16's *bhadrāsana* Buddha and the pillared shrine in which it resides had not been conceived in their present form when Varāhadeva stopped the work on his cave in the recession of 468 and hiatus of 472:

> The style and iconography of the colossal Buddha proves that it had not been either carved or indeed conceived of in this form in the first phase of work. . . . It seems likely that the *original* plan was to include -- as in nearly all other caves at the site -- an antechamber fronted by two pillars with an inner image chamber beyond. . . . If we assume that the Cave 16 shrine was indeed to have had an antechamber, it is obvious that the excavation of the first phase broke off before the cutting of the shrine area had progressed very far beyond the two front pillars; otherwise the monolithic Buddha could have been placed where it is.[64]

Although Spink cannot eliminate the possibility that Varāhadeva did originally intend a *bhadrāsana* Buddha as his cave's central deity, let us accept his point that the evidence for a drastic revision of Cave 16's Buddha-chamber signals a similarly innovative iconography for the Buddha himself. Our present task is to understand why Varāhadeva might have pressed his workers to plan and execute these innovations.

Spink himself proposes a viable entre to an answer: "perhaps this shift [to the *bhadrāsana* Buddha iconography] can be explained in part by the fact that the pralambapadasana [=*bhādrāsana*] type projected a regal authority which may have been

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[64] Walter M. Spink. "Ajaṇṭā's Chronology: The Crucial Cave," *Ars Orientalis*. 10 (1975): 158-60.

appealing in the anxious times which began so shortly after this image was completed."[65] More specifically, it would be better to view Varāhadeva's decision to adapt his cave's architecture to this regal Buddha in response to the events surrounding the Recession and Hiatus. As I discussed in the prior chapter on Ajaṇṭā's history, Spink suggests this catastrophic period resulted from a prolonged war between the rulers of Ṛṣīka and Aśmaka that took place in the Ajaṇṭā region; I revised his reconstructed history, suggesting that records from Ajaṇṭā and the surrounding territories may be interpreted as indicating that a battle took place between the two branches of the Vākāṭaka family, the Vatsagulma and Nandivardhana Vākāṭakas. Even if one does not wish to accept either reconstructed history, both being highly speculative, I have taken as a underlying principle in this dissertation that Spink's relative chronology is correct in its outlines. Thus, even if we cannot adequately explain the Recession and Hiatus, it appears that a catastrophe of significant proportions did affect Ajaṇṭā and its patrons, and that in the wake of that crisis Varāhadeva, the minster of Vākāṭaka Hariṣeṇa, reconceived his cave's central Buddha as *bhadrāsana*. Given this historical background, Varāhadeva's supposed decision to alter his *vihāra's* central image from *padmāsana* to *bhadrāsana* may be viewed as political a statement as it was religious. Devout Buddhist though he might have been, Varāhadeva was the minister of an overlord whose empire had just heard a disquieting knock.

In point of fact, I would suggest that politics, not religion, was at the heart of Varāhadeva's participation in the realization of Ajaṇṭā. Varāhadeva's dedicatory inscription impresses the reader less with his commitment to Buddhism or Buddhist ideals than with his desire to celebrate his own patron, Hariṣeṇa, and that patron's glory in terms which would have been appealed to that patron. Thus, unlike Buddhabhadra, who took a polemic line against *purāṇic* deities, and unlike Cave 17's donor, who ignored them

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[65] Walter M. Spink. *Ajanta's Buddha Imagery, Part I: The Main Phase (462-478 A.D.)*. Unpublished typescript.

altogether, Varāhadeva adopted such figures and their associated imagery as the principle source for his verses' similes. Hariṣeṇa was likened to Kṛṣṇa, Rāma, and Kāma; the cave itself was likened to Indra's palace, and Buddha to Indra himself. Indeed, although Cave 16 was dedicated to Varāhadeva's parents, the inscription details Hariṣeṇa's imperial lineage and virtually ignores Varāhadeva's own. This fact is rendered all the more notable by Varāhadeva's having donated a second cave temple at Ghaṭotkaca, at which he shows himself an eager partisan of the Buddhists and details his own line of descent. The contrast between Varāhadeva's Ajaṇṭā and Ghaṭotkaca inscriptions suggest that Varāhadeva's personal religious beliefs and expectations had very little to do with the cave he commissioned at Ajaṇṭā. Instead, I would suggest that given Cave 16's position as the site's principle vihāra (at the time of Ajaṇṭā's excavation, one had to approach the caves from the river along a path that led directly to Cave 16), given its program of decoration, and given what we have seen of its inscription, Varāhadeva was acting primarily as a good minister when he undertook this cave. His assertion of Vākāṭaka hegemony over the site was not simply for the glorification of the Buddha but for that of his own patron, Hariṣeṇa. In this light, Cave 16's image of the Buddha as King can be viewed as something of a political allegory, interpretable as an icon of King as Buddha as well.

Yet, however effective the *bhadrāsana* Buddha was as a propaganda device during this moment in Indian political history, one more crisis was needed before that figure became widely accepted and used as a free-standing cult image. Spink's motival analyses claim that after the hiatus, patronage restarted at Ajaṇṭā in earnest, with the site's programmatic patrons each striving to realize the finest, most opulent cave he could afford. This fine, careful cave-craft suddenly gave way, however, to a period in which a torrent of rushed and expedient work was done in principle areas such as the Buddha shrines, while ancillary areas were ignored. This period lasted about one year, after which Ajaṇṭā's

programmatic donors relinquished their controls, initiating the "intrusive" phase. According to Spink, the event that ruptured Vākāṭaka society and occasioned the period of rushed work was Hariṣeṇa's unexpected death.[66] Whatever the actual historical occurrence, my reconstruction of Ajaṇṭā's history agrees with that of Spink in associating the end of Ajaṇṭā's programmatic period with the demise of the Vākāṭaka empire. Accordingly, by the time the intrusive phase began, we might assume that Ajaṇṭā's community was under a great deal of pressure without any hope of protection from a temporal authority.

In sum, let us compare this situation at Ajaṇṭā to that presented in the *Book of Zambasta*. According to the Khotanese text, when the Buddha went to Trāyastriṃśa heaven, Udayana lamented that the Earth had become as a land where there is no king. Whether or not this image may be directly apropos to Ajaṇṭā, the fear of anomy this text expresses is suggestive for the site's community. *Zambasta's* King Udayana managed his anxiety over cosmic anomy by commissioning the first Buddha image. But *Zambasta's* Udayana was only afraid that the universe as a whole had lost its Lord; Udayana maintained firm control over his own domain. Moreover, one learns from *Zambasta* and Hsüan-Tsang both, that the Buddha deputed Udayana's image to serve in his stead after the parinirvāṇa. Ajaṇṭā's community was beset by a problem the converse of Udayana's. One thousand years after the parinirvāṇa, Ajaṇṭā's *Śākyabhikṣus* and *Śākya-upāsakas* were familiar with images as the embodiments of the Buddha's absent presence and present absence. As the temporal authority lost its power and social anomy threatened, Ajaṇṭā's community changed their Buddha by modifying his form. Through the *bhadrāsana* iconography, patrons at the site invoked the Buddha to act in his capacity as Cakravartin,

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[66] This is because Spink considers Cave 1 to have been Hariṣeṇa's personal donation, and Cave 1's motival development ends just before the period of rush began. That this cave was suddenly and unexpectedly abandoned is without doubt: within Cave 1 are several areas where individual figures within scenes half left in red crayon outline and half painted.

to maintain the Dharma and saṅgha at that time of crisis.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION
ON THE COMPLEX CULTURE OF BUDDHISM AT THE AJAṆṬĀ CAVES

Tour guides are the dilettantes of memory, scholars its virtuosi. Within this dissertation, I have reviewed what is required of the would-be virtuoso of Ajaṇṭā's past: analytic technique combined with a sensitivity to the site's own temperamental data. My attempt to realize this ideal has been a layered affair. I began with a prolegomenon which set forth historical, methodological, and textual bases for any future study of the community associated with Ajaṇṭā's realization. Every argument within this prolegomenon recoiled from its own assertions. Spink's relative chronology was accepted while his absolute was rejected; the *Daśakumāracarita* was used strategically as a framing story while being undermined by my suspicion of its fictive nature; Schopen's valorization of archaeological evidence was accepted within a context which argued that acceptance is not belief, and that archaeological evidence is no less ideological than textual; the *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya* was presented as a privileged source for the reconstruction of religiosity at Ajaṇṭā, though we can never be certain that this text as such was known to the site. Even my summary here is playing a double game, presenting work I myself have done in the passive voice. Perhaps discretion is the better part of virtuosity.

The dissertation's second half played a double game as well, though here with the constitutional symbols of Buddhism rather than the site itself. The attempt to situate a saṅgha at Ajaṇṭā in terms of the classically Buddhist indices of community formation -- the demarcation of *sīmā* boundaries or stipulations within the vinaya on monastic decoration -

- stalled for the lack of positive evidence with which to make such determinations. A more contemporary approach, treating saṅgha formation in terms of exchange relationships, exploded the notion of saṅgha, rendering it a null analytic category. The notion of the Dharma of Ajaṇṭā's community was similarly nebulous, forcing me to circumscribe the scope of my investigation to seek whether we could characterize Ajaṇṭā's *Śākyabhikṣus* and *Śākya-upāsakas* as Hīnayānists or Mahāyānists. I proposed that an answer to this question does not clarify anything about the site so much as it does our own prejudices concerning the history of Buddhism in India. The chapter on Buddha made this point even clearer, demonstrating that the scholarly differentiation between the Buddha as superhuman and as supermundane offers little assistance for the investigation of the Buddha at Ajaṇṭā. There, the "superhuman Buddha" was effective insofar as he acted in a manner supermundane, and the "supermundane Buddha" was effective insofar as he interacted within the human sphere.

Tour guides are the dilettantes of memory, scholars its virtuosi. In the normative economy of recollection, the scholar sets the terms of the discourse, while tour guides are expected to disseminate those terms. It would seem, however, that even virtuosi play the tour guide game . . . and necessarily so, since to tell what we know about a site like Ajaṇṭā might require that we say nothing at all. This observation brings me back to the title of this dissertation, and the title of this final chapter. What was, is, or might be the complex culture of Buddhism at the Ajaṇṭā caves? After the dissertation's first half, we can no longer be certain what "the Ajaṇṭā caves" signifies. Following the dissertation's second half, "Buddhism" is even less clear. What, then, might I conclude about the "complex culture" that I expected to find at the site? Having problematized my other points of entry beyond ready recognition, let us turn to the phrase "complex culture," since, after all, "culture" is the object of my title.

As a critical discipline, culture studies' origin is often traced to a single vastly important definition of 'culture' published in 1871 by E. B. Tylor on the first page of his *Primitive Culture:*

> Culture or Civilization, taken in its widest ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.

As historian of culture Christopher Herbert rightly observes, "the crux of this definition, the locus of both its radical modernity and (if this is not redundant) its inescapable instability, lies in the phrase 'complex whole,' which at first glance seems precisely to banish all instability."[1]

The definition of culture as a complex whole presented in Tylor's work had its first great redactor in the person of Marcel Mauss. A sociologist and anthropologist, Mauss began his classic *The Gift* with a statement of his interest in unraveling social phenomena that "contain all the threads of which the social fabric is composed."[2] Mauss's work commenced with an image of the "social fabric," a 'weave,' suggesting society as a historically textured but unchanging construct. By the finale, however, this textile metaphor was set aside in favor of the more dynamic images of "systems in motion" and "active forces submerged in their environments."[3] For Mauss, the study of society, involved "something more than a set of themes, more than institutional elements, more than institutions, more even than systems of institutions divisible into legal, economic, religious and other parts."[4] The sociologist and anthropologist was instead "concerned with 'wholes',

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[1] Christopher Herbert. *Culture and Anomie: Ethnographic Imagination in the Nineteenth Century*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991): 4.

[2] Marcel Mauss. *The Gift*. Trans. by Ian Cunnison. (New York: Norton, 1967): 1.

[3] Mauss. *The Gift,* 78.

[4] Mauss. *The Gift,* 77.

with systems in their entirety," for only by considering a society or culture within the whole is one able to see its essence, its operations and its living aspects.[5]

To accomplish this task, Mauss recommends that scholars see society "as an engineer sees masses and systems."[6] When making this recommendation Mauss likely had as his model the study of thermodynamic systems, which understands its objects of analysis to be closed orders, either at equilibrium or close to and advancing towards that static state. This paradigm allows for a certain simple elegance to the consideration of a complex domain. The social world can then be calculated as the sum of a complex of variant and invariant elements and their mutual relationships. It can be studied and understood 'mathematically,' using a 'Calculus-of-Sociology' whose differential equations track the mutual influence of individual variables in flux.

Even if this equilibrium model was not precisely what Mauss had in mind, however, the history of post-Maussian sociology and anthropology as told by Christopher Herbert suggests that such was his legacy. According to Herbert, it has become almost a "self-evident truth" that culture is a system "each factor of which is in some sense a corollary of, consubstantial with, implied by, immanent in, all the others."[7] Historically, scholars have fallen into two camps vis-à-vis cultural systematics: the relativists and the positivists. Cultural relativists treat cultures as closed systems of meanings. Here, cultures are webs of significance whose constituent signs are fully interpretable, but whose "values are ascertainable only as functions of the wholes within which they come into being."[8] Positivist scholars, like Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown, seek culture as a matter of

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[5] Mauss. *The Gift,* 77.

[6] Mauss. *The Gift,* 78.

[7] Herbert. *Culture and Anomie, 5.*

[8] Herbert. *Culture and Anomie,* 8.

"concrete, observable facts,"[9] rather than in the systemic interrelationships that link a people's values into a discernable whole. For these positivists, culture is not an imagined web of relationships binding facts; culture is either a thing itself, suitable for empirical examination, or nothing at all. The intellectual sparring between these two camps is fascinating, and is summarized in Herbert's monograph. What is important for us to recognize is that for both the relativists and positivists, culture is said to be 'complex' as a function of the sheer multitude of factors that coexist within its whole. For instance, Tylor sees culture as the unification of social knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, and custom; Mauss too enumerates the social phenomena within his whole, which include the "legal, economic, religious, aesthetic, morphological, and so on."[10] Moreover, cultural relativists and positivists alike understand such a complex abundance of cultural/social factors to comprise a 'whole' because both understand the system of values these define to be closed and at equilibrium. For the relativists, cultural meaning is a function of the totality of all cultural factors, and can never exceed that totality. For the positivists, meaning is a function of empirical facts, and has value only insofar as it corresponds to those facts, again without excess. In both cases, total systemic entropy is ideally fixed.

As Herbert indicates, current critiques of culture treat this concept as "infested with logical incoherence,"[11] for both the relativist and positivist approaches tend towards infinite regress under direct analysis of their presuppositions. The trouble is, in short, that cultural meaning is not a closed system, either internally or externally. That is, meaning is not solely a function of an integral whole or empirical facts, but transcends closed systemic boundaries; the whole can never account for all possible meaning, and cannot be truly

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[9] Herbert. *Culture and Anomie,* 10.

[10] Mauss. *The Gift,* 76-77.

[11] Herbert. *Culture and Anomie,* 21.

whole. This is a fuzzy way of restating Gödel's proposition that "given *any* consistent set of arithmetical axioms, there are true arithmetical statements that cannot be derived from the set."[12]

Why, then, have I titled this chapter and, indeed, the dissertation in such a manner as to suggest one can find a Buddhist culture, a complex whole, at Ajaṇṭā? The answer lies in the interstices between the scholar's silent role as a virtuoso of memory and his inevitable chatter as a tour guide. In the recovery of meaning we produce meaning anew: meaning whose significance lies in its ability to bring life to the slide-show; meaning whose truth lies in the slides themselves. *Mahāyāna, sīmā, lokottara Buddha* these are the Buddhists' own measures of their tradition, italicized for emphasis, brought to bear, abandoned. And this is how one finds a complex culture of Buddhism at Ajaṇṭā: neither at Ajaṇṭā itself, nor within Buddhists' own textual guides to symbolic values, but in the present moment's creation of a possible past.

This point lay beneath my discussion of Schopen's "Archaeology of Religion." Within that chapter I suggested that symbolic values should be understood according to the Piercean idiom as tripartite: as "signs" comprised of the sign itself, the object, and the interpretant. In the context of that discussion I observed that by treating archaeological data as Piercean signs, the 'symbolic values' indicated by such evidence will be understood to be complex and irreducible, self-referential and othered, fluid and evolutionary. Within the present context, a Piercean understanding of 'symbolic values' allows for a complex culture of Buddhism at the Ajaṇṭā caves that avoids the positivist and relativist positions described by Herbert. One can treat 'cultural values' as forming a complex whole insofar one treats them as adaptive; adaptivity is precisely that quality which enables a system of meaning to remain complex and whole while it develops within a dynamic progression of

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[12] Ernest Nagel and James Roy Newman. *Gödel's Proof.* (New York: New York University Press, 1958): 58-9.

discursive relationships.

Using the Piercean sign as a model, one can understand the culture of Buddhism at Ajaṇṭā to have been 'complex' because its potential for meaning has always exceeded apparent systemic limits. One can understand the complex culture of Buddhism at Ajaṇṭā to have been 'whole' because signs, in their material aspect, limit their excess of meaning, even if this materiality cannot ultimately delimit or determine meaning. One can understand the complex cultural whole of Buddhism at Ajaṇṭā to have been 'adaptive' because the Piercean sign's self-definition incorporates self-transformation: this is a function of the necessary inclusion of an interpretant to bring together sign and object. We rely upon evidence from Ajaṇṭā for the recovery of meanings of the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha "local" to Ajaṇṭā; yet this evidence is meaningful only insofar the meanings it holds *in potentia* transgress Ajaṇṭā's local cultural boundaries, become incorporated into alien systems of meaning -- our own -- and displace other, established meanings, which then become evolutionary potential for future interpretation by future interpretants. Seek a complex culture of Buddhism at the Ajaṇṭā caves and you shall find . . . but do not look too closely!

Culture is a complex whole insofar as its elements are diverse and linked; it is a complex adaptive whole insofar as the symbolic values which comprise it are fluid, open to reinterpretation and reintegration. Such evolution doubtless went on at Ajaṇṭā. But the significance of Ajaṇṭā's local Buddhism continues to evolve as the symbolic values associated with Ajaṇṭā and Buddhism alike evolve within the free-flow of academic discourse.

APPENDICES

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